

**Neo-exogenous Development: Conceptualising Rural  
Revitalisation in China.**

**A Study on Modern Agricultural Zones**

**Shengxi Xin**



**PhD in Planning Studies**

**University College London**

## **Declaration**

I, Shengxi Xin confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis

## **Acknowledgement**

This study was primarily completed during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by subtle yet significant changes in my country and across human society. The frequent lockdowns cast a shadow of solitude and difficulty over my doctoral journey. Yet, it was also a time graced with immense support and assistance, without which this research would not have been possible. Therefore, I seize this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to those who illuminated my path.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge Professor Nick Gallent and Dr. Iqbal Hamiduddin for their supervisory roles during the course of this research. Their support has provided a framework within which this study was able to progress. Their expertise and thoughtful mentorship have been beacons, guiding me steadily on my journey to becoming a competent researcher.

I am also deeply indebted to my parents. Their unconditional love and understanding have been the pillars that supported me through the darker moments of my doctoral studies. Equally, my gratitude extends to my girlfriend, whose companionship and tolerance have seen me through countless days of anxiety and hesitation, preventing me from descending into a state akin to the Steppenwolf in Hermann Hesse's narrative.

I owe special thanks to Mr. Wu and Mr. Hang for their crucial support during my fieldwork amidst the pandemic, ensuring its successful completion under extraordinary circumstances.

## Impact Statement

My thesis enriches the discourse in rural development by introducing the neo-exogenous model (NED) as a unique framework within the Chinese governance context. This paradigm shift, moving away from predominantly Western perspectives, offers a fresh lens through which to view rural development, particularly in countries with strong centralised governance structures.

By analysing the operational mechanisms and policy effectiveness of the Modern Agricultural Zone (MAZ), this research enhances methodological approaches in evaluating rural development models through a relational perspective. It stresses the importance of local value retention, a critical aspect often overlooked in global rural development assessments. The insights from this thesis could be incorporated into academic curricula, offering students a broader, more inclusive understanding of rural development strategies across different political and socio-economic contexts.

The findings also provide valuable insights for policymakers, particularly in nations pursuing rural revitalisation under a strong central government. Understanding the dynamics of the NED model can guide the design and implementation of more effective rural development policies.

Moreover, by highlighting the role of local and external stakeholders in rural development, this research can inform commercial and social enterprises seeking to engage in rural areas. It underscores the importance of collaboration with local communities and government bodies for sustainable development.

In terms of public discourse and awareness, the key findings have de-encharnted the rural revitalisation of China. It allows the policy framework itself to be discussed and analysed more comprehensively within the paradigms of planning studies, rural geography and political science, among other social sciences. Such enlightenment is pivotal in shaping a well-informed public discourse, which is essential for the democratic evaluation and constructive critique of public policies.

There are several mechanisms for realizing the impacts. Publishing the findings in academic journals and presenting at conferences will disseminate the knowledge within academic circles, sparking further research and discussion. Also, direct engagement with policymakers and government bodies can facilitate the translation of research findings into practical policy measures. Moreover, partnering with academic and non-academic entities, including NGOs and private sector stakeholders, can extend the practical application of the research findings in real-world scenarios. Additionally, workshops and seminars targeting stakeholders in rural development can aid in translating the research findings into actionable strategies at the grassroots level.

In summary, the research presented in my thesis holds significant potential for influencing both academic thought and practical approaches to rural development, particularly in contexts resembling the Chinese model of centralised governance and rural regeneration.

## Abstract

Since the launch of its “New Socialist Countryside Construction” (NSCC) programme in 2005, China has experienced significant rural restructuring, marked by both new urban-rural connectivity and a diversification of rural socio-economic and spatial structures. Thereafter, and under the Xi administration, the “National Rural Revitalisation Strategy” was launched. It can be considered to be both a successor to the NSCC and to represent renewed effort to integrate pluralising rural society into the party-state apparatus through state programmes that increasingly involve local and external social stakeholders in the implementation stage. This national integration process of rural society, also known as rural integration, is in line with China's rural governance and development tradition which both date back to Imperial China. Viewed in this manner, the NRRS can be seen as part of a broader state-building objective.

This recent governance transition has led to the emergence of a hybrid rural development approach which is referred to, in this thesis, as “neo-exogenous development” (NED). Unlike community-oriented (neo-)endogenous development approaches, NED is characterised by a party-state-led collaborative innovation process in which the ‘active party-state’ — comprised of both central- and local- state bureaucrats and semi-formal rural party agents — act as the primary development actors rather than civil society groups. In addition to physical improvement, the NED aims to guide rural communities towards becoming “activated communities” that understand how to communicate and cooperate with the “active party-state”, as a result of rural integration.

This thesis has two main goals: first, it provides deeper understanding of rural development theory and practice in China, by shifting to a conception of rural development that is rooted in the longer Chinese experience of state-building and unique party-state regime rather than in Western (and mainly European) analyses. Secondly, it unpacks the operational mechanisms and policy effectiveness of NED, which are represented in the thesis by the Modern Agricultural Zone (MAZ). For the purpose of evaluation, effectiveness centres on the propensity of a development model to generate and retain local value; a major challenge for global rural development practice.

## Glossaries

### - Acronyms

CLGRW: Central Leading Group for Rural Work

CPC: Communist Party of China

LEADER: Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale

MARA: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs

MAZ: Modern Agriculture Zone

MoF: Ministry of Finance

MoHURD: Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development

NED: Neo-exogenous Development

NRRS: National Rural Revitalisation Strategy

NSCC: New Countryside Construction Campaign

TVE: Town-and Village-owned Enterprises

YIDC: Yangmatang Investment and Development Corporation

### - Local political jargons

**Great Unity of Chinese People (中国人民大团结):** This political concept was raised by Mao Zedong in 1949. Stemming from ancient Chinese thought, particularly the Confucian ideal of Great Unity (大同), it refers to the ideal of national unity and solidarity among the diverse ethnic groups within China. This is integral to the party's vision of building a strong, unified, and prosperous nation with a unified national identity.

**Harmonious Society (和谐社会) :** This was first raised by Hu Jintao in 2005. It emphasises achieving balanced and sustainable development, social equity, democracy, the rule of law, and cultural vitality. It has the ultimate goal of creating a stable, equitable,

and prosperous society in China. This political concept is also rooted in Great Unity, where people live in harmony with each other and the environment.

**Community for Shared Future for Mankind (人类命运共同体)**: Introduced by Xi Jinping around 2013, this concept aligns with Great Unity by promoting a vision of global harmony and cooperation. This concept extends the idea of internal societal harmony to the international stage, and suggests that nations should work together towards common goals, respect each other's sovereignty, and seek mutual benefits and shared security. It is a modern interpretation of the Great Unity ideal in the context of global geopolitics.

**Harmonious and Beautiful Countryside (和美乡村)**: Proposed by Xi Jinping in 2023, this planning slogan envisions transforming rural areas into socially harmonious and environmentally beautiful villages. It underscores the importance of sustainable development, ecological conservation, and improved living standards in rural China and seeks to both narrow the existent urban-rural divide, and enhance the overall quality of life in rural areas. It can be seen as an application of Great Unity within the context of rural China, and focuses on creating harmonious, aesthetically pleasing, and sustainable rural environment. This concept aligns with Great Unity's emphasis on societal balance, moral righteousness, and the well-being of all members of communities, but is specifically tailored to address the contemporary challenges faced by China's rural areas.

**Hukou (户口)**: The modern *hukou* system, also known as the household registration system, was established in 1958 by the Chinese government. The system categorises citizens as either rural or urban residents, with different entitlements and restrictions. It significantly influences their access to public services, education, and employment opportunities.

**Fengqiao Experience (枫桥经验)**: It refers to a community-based approach for conflict resolution and social management which was initiated in the Fengqiao District of Zhujiajiang City, Zhejiang Province, during the 1960s. It emphasises the need to resolve social disputes and conflicts at a community level, so as to prevent the escalation of minor issues into major ones, and promotes harmony in communities by relying on local people and their self-governing organisations rather than resorting to higher formal authorities or

legal procedures. This approach in the Maoist era has been re-emphasised as a successful example of community self-management by Xi Jinping in party-led rural governance work since 2013.

## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction.....	16
Chapter Two: Chinese Rural Development in an International Context .....	23
2.1 Beyond dualism: the evolution of world rural development theories, from sectoral to territorial development and to networked development.....	24
(1) <i>Exogenous development</i> .....	24
(2) <i>Endogenous development</i> .....	26
(3) <i>Neo-endogenous development</i> .....	28
(4) <i>The networked approach, social innovation, and nexogenous development</i> .....	30
2.2 'From government to governance': social governance changes behind paradigm shifts ..	35
Chapter Three: The Superstructure of Chinese Rural Governance: Central-Local Party-State Bureaucracy, Urban-Rural Relations and Growth Machine.....	42
3.1 From Indigenous origins or foreign influences? The Logic of China's party-state-led social governance system .....	42
(1) <i>The Historic consistency of China's social governance structure</i> .....	42
(2) <i>Towards unity and integration: Chinese party-state system and national integration</i> .....	47
(3) <i>Chinese central-local governmental relationships and governance features: administrative subcontracting and political tournament</i> .....	52
(4) <i>Challenges of party-state governance: fragmented local governance, inter-governmental rat race, and urban growth machine</i> .....	55
3.2 Institutionalised urban-rural dualism and structural scarcity of local resources in rural China.....	59
Chapter Four: Rural Integration and China's Rural Development and Governance. Legacies and Evolutions .....	66
4.1 Rural governance in the Imperial Age: Gentry and the <i>Xiang-Li</i> institution.....	66
4.2 Rural governance in the Maoist age: village cadres, the grassroots party system, and communes.....	70
4.3 Rural governance in the early Open Reform: village cadres, village committees, and state withdrawal .....	73
4.4 Rural governance before the Xi Era: programme-based governance and rural restructuring .....	76
Chapter Five: Conceptualising 'Neo-exogenous Development' .....	83



5.1 Rural governance in the Xi Era: active party-state and activated communities .....	83
(1) <i>The Active party-state</i> .....	87
(2) <i>Activated community</i> .....	92
5.2 What is neo-exogenous development? A party-led networked approach towards national integration .....	96
Chapter Six: MAZ, Study Areas and Methodology .....	104
6.1 What and why is MAZ? .....	104
6.2 How were the MAZs selected? .....	111
6.3 The Case Study areas .....	118
(1) <i>Binding Village: Bamboo MAZ and Lanjing Village, Qianfen County of Sichuan</i> .....	119
(2) <i>Striving Village: Orange MAZ and Qianjiachi Village, Qianfen County of Sichuan</i> .....	122
(3) <i>Receiving Village: Fruit MAZ and Yangmatang Village, Lianyin County of Jiangsu</i> .....	124
6.4 Analytical framework .....	127
(1) <i>Linking relationship / networks</i> .....	129
(2) <i>Bonding relationship / networks</i> .....	131
(3) <i>Bridging relationships / networks</i> .....	132
6.5 Research method .....	133
(1) <i>Data collection and protection</i> .....	133
(2) <i>Data analysis and presentation</i> .....	139
Chapter Seven: Bamboo MAZ and Lanjing Village .....	147
7.1 Problematism .....	147
<i>Critical incident 1: Village and county were designated with an award from central government</i> .....	147
<i>Critical incident 2: Visit of provincial party secretary and establishment of Bamboo MAZ</i> .....	149
7.2 Expressions of interest .....	153
<i>Critical incident 3: Establishment of village collective tourism management company</i> .....	153
7.3 Delineation and coordination .....	160
<i>Critical incident 4: Establishment of new community self-governance organisations</i> .....	160
7.4 Summary .....	166
Chapter Eight: Orange MAZ and Qianjiachi Village .....	167
8.1 Problematism .....	168
<i>Critical incident 1: Restructuring of community leadership and initiation of reclaiming project</i> .....	168

<i>Critical incident 2: Establishment of Orange cooperative and proposal of Orange MAZ</i> .....	171
8.2 Expression of interest .....	174
<i>Critical incident 3: Establishment and progression of Orange MAZ</i> .....	174
<i>Critical incident 4: Designation as the Liaison Village of the central authority</i> .....	178
8.3 Delineation and coordination .....	183
<i>Critical incident 5: Expansion of party organisations and services within the zone and village</i> .....	183
<i>Critical incident 6: Bottom-up land entrustment reform</i> .....	188
<i>Critical incident 7: Adaptive strategy to MAZ policy shift by government-village coalition</i> ..	190
8.4 Summary .....	191
Chapter Nine: Fruit MAZ and Yangmatang Village .....	193
9.1 Problematisation.....	193
<i>Critical incident 1: From prefectural-level MAZ to provincial-level Resort Zone</i> .....	193
<i>Critical incident 2: Designation as a candidate of the “Characteristic Countryside”</i> .....	198
9.2 Expression of interest .....	202
<i>Critical incident 3: Development of Caoqiuhuazhu Hotel</i> .....	202
9.3 Delineation and coordination .....	209
<i>Critical incident 4: Withdrawal of the village development corporation</i> .....	209
9.4 Summary .....	215
Chapter Ten: Discussion. Practical Mechanism and Outcomes of NED .....	217
10.1 Practical mechanism of NED .....	218
(1) <i>Political mobilisation</i> .....	218
(2) <i>Party-state legislation and regulation</i> .....	220
(3) <i>Rescaling</i> .....	221
(4) <i>Programme-based financial support</i> .....	222
(5) <i>Party-building</i> .....	224
(6) <i>Urban-rural connecting</i> .....	227
(7) <i>Rural integration machine: dual historical logics and practical mechanism of NED</i>	230
10.2 Practical outcomes of NED .....	244
(1) <i>Party-state: party’s long whip for the local states and communities</i> .....	244
(2) <i>Rural party organisation: from the soil, facing the state</i> .....	247
(3) <i>Villagers: socio-economic advancement and tamed participation</i> .....	251
(4) <i>Extra-local actors: political dividends and tributes</i> .....	255

(5) <i>The sustainability challenges of NED’s socio-economic advancement</i> .....	257
Chapter Eleven: Conclusion and Recommendations .....	263
11.1 Contributions and limitations of the research .....	263
(1) <i>Epistemology: how can we understand the rural development practice of China and Global South/East?</i> .....	263
(2) <i>Methodology: how can Chinese rural development practices under NRRS be examined?</i> .....	266
(3) <i>Ontology: what are Chinese rural development practices under the NRRS?</i> .....	268
11.2 Recommendations.....	270
(1) <i>Creating a community-facing intermediary group</i> .....	270
(2) <i>Creating an innovation-friendly programme-based governance structure</i> .....	273
<b>References</b> .....	279
<b>Appendix A: List of key political reform and campaigns of CPC China</b> .....	311
<b>Appendix B: Additional context information of Chinese government and governance for international audience</b> .....	314
<b>Appendix C: Interview Questions</b> .....	316

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Chinese bureaucratic structure in ancient China (Source: Author's own).....	46
Figure 3.2 The bureaucratic structure of modern China (Source: Author's own, based on data from NBS, 2021a).....	47
Figure 3.3 The logic of Chinese bureaucracy and local governance framework (Source: Author's own).....	59
Figure 3.4 The urban-rural dualist social governance structure that causes Chinese rural marginalisation (Source: Author's own).....	65
Figure 5.1 Mechanism of Neo-exogenous Development (Source: Author's Own) .....	98
Figure 6.1 Map of study areas (rough location, only to indicate the province) (Source: Author's own) .....	119
Figure 6.2 Aerial view of core development area of Bamboo MAZ (source: Qianfen Government, 2022) .....	121
Figure 6.3 A glimpse of Lanjing Village from an aerial perspective in 2021 (source: Qianfen Government, 2022) .....	122
Figure 6.4 A view of core development area of Orange MAZ (source: Qianfen Government, 2022) .....	123
Figure 6.5 A glimpse of Qianjiachi Village from an aerial perspective in 2021 (source: Qianfen Government, 2022) .....	124
Figure 6.6 A view of core development area of Fruit MAZ (source: Fruit MAZ Management Committee, 2022).....	125
Figure 6.7 A glimpse of Yangmatang Village from an aerial perspective in 2022 (source: Author's own, 2022).....	126
Figure 7.1 China Bamboo Art City established by Chun Yufang (source: Author's own) ...	148
Figure 7.2 International Bamboo Art Exhibition Hall (source: Author's own) .....	152
Figure 7.3 INBR training workshop on bamboo weaving (source: Qianfen Government, 2022) .....	153
Figure 7.4 The main road of the Lanjing Village after the Bamboo Alley Village Regeneration Project (source: Author's own).....	157
Figure 7.5 Creative bamboo art products of Lanjing 1 (source: Author's own) .....	159
Figure 7.6 Creative bamboo art products of Lanjing 2 (source: Author's own) .....	159
Figure 7.7 Museums, hotpot restaurant and a boutique hotel (from left to right) (source: Author's own) .....	160
Figure 7.8 Actor network for the development of Lanjing village (Source: Author's own) ..	163

Figure 8.1 Cold storage facility of Qianjiachi (Source: Author's own) .....	172
Figure 8.2 A bird view of orange sorting and cold-chain base within the Orange MAZ (Source: Qianfen Government, 2022) .....	182
Figure 8.3 On the left is the lecture schedule at the entrance of the public lecture hall, and on the right are photos of the village history museum (Source: left, Author's own; right, Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2022) .....	185
Figure 8.4 Actor network for the development of Qianjiachi village (Source: Author's own) .....	187
Figure 9.1 Caoqiuhuazhu Hotels (Source: Author's own).....	203
Figure 9.2 Sweet potato products: From left to right, they are sweet potato beer, sweet potato biscuits, and sweet potato <i>shaojiu</i> liquor (Source: Author's own). .....	205
Figure 9.3 Actor network for the development of Yangmatang Village (Source: Author's own) .....	211
Figure 10.1 Relations between dual historic logics and practical mechanism of NED (Source: Author's own) .....	235

## List of Tables

Table 2.1 Exogenous, endogenous, and neo-endogenous development and key characteristics (Source: author’s own) .....	29
Table 4.1 Methods of Rural Value Capture During the Collectivisation Period (Source: author’s own).....	72
Table 4.2 Evolution of rural governance in China (Source: Author’s own).....	81
Table 5.1 NED and mainstream International rural development paradigms (source: Author’s own) .....	100
Table 6.1 Goals of MAZ Policy (adapted from MoA 2017) .....	106
Table 6.2 Principles of MAZ Policy (Source: Adapted from MoA, 2017a).....	107
Table 6.3 Evaluation Framework of National-Level MAZ (Source: Adapted from MoA, 2017a) .....	108
Table 6.4 Regional distribution of national-level MAZ and candidates (Source: Author’s Own) .....	110
Table 6.5 Typology of Rural Areas in England (Source: adapted from Murdoch et al., 2003 .....	112
Table 6.6 He’s Typology of Rural China (Source: adapted from He, 2012).....	114
Table 6.7 Li’s Typology of Rural China (Source: adapted from Li, 2013; Zhu, 2017) .....	117
Table 6.8 Analytical framework on the changes of relationships and relational resources in NED practice (source: Author’s own) .....	128
Table 6.9 Interview subjects .....	136
Table 6.10 Interview topics .....	137
Table 6.11 Narratives of MAZ programmes as NED collaborative innovation (Source: author’s own).....	141
Table 7.1 Major public investment projects of MAZ in Lanjing Village.....	152
Table 8.1 Selected supportive projects and policies by the Orange MAZ (Source: Author’s own)).....	177
Table 9.1 Selected private enterprises in the Fruit MAZ (Source: Author’s own) .....	195
Table 9.2 Examples of recent private investment projects in MAZ .....	197
Table 10.1 The practical mechanism of active party-state of NED and corresponding central policies (Source: Author’s own).....	223
Table 10.2 The practical mechanism of activated community of NED and corresponding central policies (Source: Author’s own) .....	229

Table 10.3 Corresponding local initiatives to shape active party-state in the case studies  
(Source: Author's own)..... 241

Table 10.4 Corresponding local initiatives to shape activated community in the case studies  
(Source: Author's own)..... 243

Table 10.5 Summary of impacts of NED on key stakeholders (Source: Author's own) ..... 261

## Chapter One: Introduction

Since the 1990s, the exogenous-endogenous development dichotomy (Lowe et al., 1998) has been slowly supplanted by a focus on neo-endogenous mechanisms: a networked approach that focuses on the dynamic interactions between local areas and wider environments (Ray, 2001). While this paradigm shift appears to be rooted in the European context, it is not exclusive to it. Many rural areas in other regions, such as Australia, the United States of America, and some Global South countries, have also demonstrated increasing focus on local capacities in the development process, moving away from top-down exogenous models (Barraket et al., 2017; Novikova, 2021; Qin et al., 2020; Stimson et al., 2011). Neo-endogenous development integrates the top-down and sectoral exogenous model with the bottom-up and territorial endogenous model by focusing on both internal and external networks (Bosworth et al., 2016a; Gkartzios and Scott, 2014). The neo-endogenous approach advocates locally-rooted and community-led development while also highlighting essential and beneficial collaborations with extra-local actor networks (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019). As a result of this shift, rural areas are now often seen as hybrid spaces that are embedded in wider institutional, socio-economic, and natural networks (Woods, 2009). Researchers have been using the 'relational approach' (Woods, 2011) to study local and extra-local agency and power dynamics in (neo-)endogenous programmes such as the LEADER policy (Bock, 2019; Cejudo and Navarro, 2020).

The shift towards neo-endogenous development in both theory and policy applications reflects the socio-political transition from government to governance in the West (Bock, 2019) a process by which traditional top-down state administration has been replaced by social relationships in networked and pluralist societies (Urry, 2000). This shift has also been associated with the rise of neo-liberalism as a political ideology, and has led to significant state withdrawal and the transfer of public responsibilities to communities and private sectors across urban and rural areas of Europe (Bock, 2016). Despite these changes, disparities continue to exist in the rural sphere as a consequence of ongoing value extraction in marginal localities (Woods, 2011). This issue is a persistent challenge in global rural development (Gkartzios et al., 2021).



Rural China has experienced significant transformation as a result of its meteoric globalisation and urbanisation (Luo, 2020; Long, 2012). Rather than the devolutionary transition seen in the West, the Chinese government<sup>1</sup> has intervened intensively in restructuring rural areas through the “National Rural Revitalisation Strategy” (NRRS) that was launched in 2017. The NRRS manifests the resolution of the Xi administration to combat severe urban-rural disparities, and has led to nation-wide institutional concern for rural development. In general, it has sought to integrate smallholders into modern agriculture and to involve extra-local actors (i.e., urban citizens, urban enterprises, and rural migrants) in state-led rural development activities (Zhan, 2020). Party committees and governments at all levels have been mobilised to march towards the rural and, as a result, China's rural governance has become increasingly reliant on state resources through various rural development programmes (Shen, 2020; Wu, 2018).

However, despite being designed as a top-down strategy, the NRRS exhibits some characteristics of networked rural development. Many of the NRRS's policies highlight community involvement and collaboration with extra-local actors in the implementation stage, and this has resulted in a shift towards more innovative and community-based local practices (Wu, 2018; Ye et al., 2018; Zhang and Zhang, 2018).

In short, the NRRS involves utilising exogenous investment and the country's powerful party-state system to both promote collaborative innovation among local and extra-local actors, and foster the establishment of community-based but state-led actor networks which can address rural marginalisation. Given China's unique ‘reaching-in’ position of state power and its socio-political context, the emerging Chinese networked rural development approach can be referred to as “neo-exogenous development (NED)”, a

---

<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, when referring to the term “government” (政府) within the Chinese context, the concept encompasses both party organs (党的机构) and state departments (国家机关), acting as the governing entity. It is synonymous with another term used in this thesis, which is “party-state”. Additionally, unless explicitly stated, within the Chinese context, the term “party” and its related positions or departments, such as “party secretary” or “party committee”, refer specifically to the Communist Party of China (CPC) and not to other “democratic parties” (民主党派) in China. For further details about China's party-state system, please see Section 3.1 and Appendix B.

label which acknowledges its combination of a predominantly exogenous structure with some steered endogenous features.

Recent studies have employed theories such as (neo-)endogenous development, and state entrepreneurship to analyse NRRS practices (though not Modern Agriculture Zone (MAZ)) and conceptualise their underlying governance structures (Gao et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). However, this study posits that existing research has not clarified the structural logics that underly rural development paradigms in the Xi Jinping era, and that they therefore lack a comprehensive conceptualisation based on its dynamic mechanisms.

This thesis argues that the governance structure in which the NRRS is embedded is shaped by two interrelated historical logics: the unique authoritarian party-state system established since the 1950s, and the (often overlooked) -two-millennia-long clientelist tradition of rural governance that has sought to enable “rural integration” (Xu, 2022, p.5), a process of linking socio-culturally separated rural communities with single territorial unit and building national identity. Amid the recent accelerated process of rural restructuring and the unsustainability of the urbanisation-driven growth model, these two logics jointly generated the NRRS. This policy discourse of the Xi administration is deconstructed and reconstituted by this thesis as NED. From the perspective of mainstream rural development, NED is a party-state-led networked development model that promotes collaborative innovation among various stakeholders. However, this model is also embedded within China's broader state-building endeavours, and thereby prioritises the integration and governance control of rural areas over socio-economic development.

Although this thesis attempts to conceptualise NRRS through the lens of Chinese (rural) governance practices and their historical legacies, as indicated by the choice of the terminology to conceptualise it — neo-exogenous development, the author also engages with existing mainstream theories and discourses on rural development. This is imperative because, as suggested by Gkartzios and Lowe (2019), the paucity of descriptions and analysis concerning the mechanisms and dynamics of rural development practices in the Global South has implications for the local theoretical

production, as well as the dialogues of rural development theories which exist between the Global North and the Global South. In the realm of geography studies in China, this research gap has led to increasing divergence between universalism and exceptionalism (Deng, 2023; Ren, 2021). Specifically, within the ambit of Chinese rural research, the universalist perspective often reduces the rural to a residual outcome of the urban, and therefore primarily focuses on its passive role under the state-led urban growth machine — a perspective that is whilst valid, insufficient in explaining the emergence of growth-agnostic policies such as the NRRS in the Xi Jinping era (Wu and Zhang, 2022). Conversely, exceptionalist views are predominantly articulated by domestic sociologists, who seek to decouple from Western rural development theories and revert to ancient Chinese kinship and clan relationships in order to formulate a Chinese theory of rural development (see, for instance, He, 2022). However, this thesis argues that this perspective not only underestimates the forces of urbanisation but also neglects the decisive role that the state has played in the social governance of China over millennia.

This thesis focuses on MAZ, a nationally-promoted yet under-researched NRRS policy, and posits that it is emblematic of NED. Through this lens, the study unveils the operational mechanism of NED, explores the dynamics between local governance and party-state intervention, and discusses the implications of NED for the future evolution of government interventions in other places in the world. Three MAZs in different rural areas of China are examined in order to determine whether this unique operational mechanism can empower rural communities and help them retain the value generated by development. It should also be noted that the central contribution of this research is to elucidate the dynamic implementation mechanisms of China's NED model at the local level, rather than to offer particular suggestions for substantial improvements for China or a universal alternative model for rural networked development theories.

The main research question of the thesis is: what are the mechanisms and effectiveness of the transitioning rural development paradigm under Xi's rural revitalisation strategies? To answer this question, several sub-research questions are also addressed:

- 1) What are the mainstream rural development theories at the global level, and how has their evolution contributed to the conceptualisation of practices in rural China? (Chapter Two)
- 2) How does the existing Chinese social governance system differ from that of Western countries? (Chapter Three)
- 3) What are the key characteristics of Chinese rural development history, and what governance legacies and challenges have they bequeathed to the Xi administration? (Chapter Four)
- 4) What is Xi's NRRS, the policy framework of NED, and how does it diverge from mainstream Western paradigms as well as previous Chinese paradigms? (Chapter Five)
- 5) How can one analyse the practical mechanisms and effectiveness of NED policies? (Chapter Six)
- 6) What are the socio-economic impacts of NED practices in different types of rural areas in China? (Chapter Seven to Nine)
- 7) What are the practical mechanisms and socio-economic impacts of NED? Can it sustainably advance rural households' socio-economic well-being and effectively address China's rural marginalisation? (Chapter Ten)
- 8) What is the value of NED to global rural development studies? How can it be enhanced in the future? (Chapter Eleven)

Addressing these research questions, this thesis is comprised of eleven chapters. Chapter Two reviews the evolution of rural development theories, and how they have transitioned from exogenous, through to endogenous, and thence to networked development. Understanding of the same situates the NED within mainstream international theories. Additionally, the insights derived from the chapter directed this research to employ the social governance context as the lens through which to

conceptualise the NED. Furthermore, the three-step structure of social innovation — problematisation, expression of interest, and delineation and coordination — is elucidated in this chapter. This structure is, thereafter, employed within the narrative analysis of this study as the storyline that articulates the content of the work's case studies. Through so doing the study aims to connect NED practices characterised by collaborative innovation with mainstream rural development theories, and thereby foster cross-context theoretical dialogue.

This study contends that the practical mechanisms of NED are mainly rooted in clientelist state-society relations, (which have been historically formed with the objective of rural integration and can be traced back to imperial times), as well as by the CPC-led party-state system. Given this, the third chapter investigates China's party-state bureaucratic apparatus and the resultant dualistic urban-rural relations that have been engendered by the party-state's ambitions for industrialisation and urbanisation. Thereafter, the fourth chapter offers an historical examination of Chinese rural governance and development, tracing its trajectory from the Imperial era, through the Maoist period, into the early stages of the Open Reform and up to the NSCC era. Central to this analysis is the continuous emphasis of central authority on rural integration and ensuing management of a clientelist rural governance structure marked by intermediary groups (i.e., gentries, village cadres etc.) throughout these periods.

In the fifth chapter, the thesis examines the background against which the NRRS was introduced and its constitutive policy framework. It argues that this framework embodies two distinguishing elements: active party-state and active community, the institutional architecture and foreseeable outcomes of NED. These features not only offer heuristic cues for subsequent empirical investigation but also lay the groundwork for the final conceptualisation of NED.

The methodology of the thesis is discussed in Chapter Six. In addition to research methods, the chapter explains why the MAZ programme is considered to be emblematic of NED practices and categorises the differentiated practice environments of rural China into three types of villages based on existing studies. In order to examine the practical

mechanisms and dynamics of NED policies, three MAZs, two located in western China and one in eastern China, were selected for investigation, along with a village in the core development area of each zone. In addition, this chapter also notes how this study's fieldwork data is analysed (narrative analysis) and presented (three-step innovation structure) within chapters seven, eight, and nine.

The seven to ninth chapters present the findings from the work's three case studies. All of the chapters are structured in the same manner; they cover the history of MAZ development and the collaborative innovation processes that have taken place between the state and the given communities.

Chapter Ten elucidates the practical mechanisms of NED and its impacts on different stakeholders. The chapter conceptualises NED and engages in a discussion as to its potential to sustainably advance the socio-economic well-being of rural areas and communities in China.

Thereafter, and finally, the concluding chapter discusses the contributions of NED to global discourses on rural development. It also provides recommendations for improving this emergent networked development approach in China.

## **Chapter Two: Chinese Rural Development in an International Context**

In the late 1970s, a paradigm shift occurred in world rural development theories, moving from the exogenous model that advocated for a top-down, productivist approach, to the endogenous model that emphasised bottom-up, community-led development (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019; van der Ploeg and van Dijk, 1995; Woods, 2010). In recent years, the neo-endogenous approach, derived from Lowe et al.'s (1995) research on rural networked development, has emerged as a prominent theory in rural development studies.

The sub-research question addresses by this chapter is: what are the mainstream rural development theories at the global level, and how has their evolution contributed to the conceptualisation of practices in rural China? In order to provide a theoretical context and to situate the Chinese paradigm. This thesis examines the evolution of key rural development theories in Section 1.1. Thereafter, Section 1.2 explores the changes to governance contexts in the West that led to this theoretical evolution.

While this chapter mainly provides a theoretical discussion of rural development, it is not the fundamental theoretical framework used that is subsequently used to conceptualise the NED model under Xi administration. Rather, its principal contributions to the overall research are twofold. First, the chapter helps to situate the NED in the international theoretical discussions. Second, the chapter introduces the theories of networked development and social innovation. Although these theories remain anchored in a relatively Western neoliberal governance framework, as articulated by Bock (2016), they resonate with China's NED practices. This emerging Chinese rural development model is also a multi-stakeholder, collaborative innovation mechanism that includes urban and rural actors, albeit with a more significant role being played by the party-state and other public entities.

## **2.1 Beyond dualism: the evolution of world rural development theories, from sectoral to territorial development and to networked development**

### *(1) Exogenous development*

The exogenous model, also referred to as rural modernisation, is premised upon the theories of modernisation and the growth pole. This model, which was once prevalent in the field of development studies, posits that the development of human societies proceeds along a linear path from traditional to modern societies (Taylor, 1989, as cited in Woods, 2011). Despite the ongoing dispute that exists over the definitions of tradition and modernity, the modernisation paradigm simplifies and dichotomises the complex reality of our world into two groups, with one being more developed than the other (Woods, 2011).

From a historical perspective, the prosperity of developed societies since the nineteenth-century industrial revolution has been materially represented by industrialisation and urbanisation. The rural, as an opposite to the industrialised world, is thus considered by modernists to be residual and subordinate spaces to the urban (Murdoch and Pratt, 1993). Proponents of the exogenous model view rural areas as a space for production and identify low productivity as the determining cause of both rural depopulation and poverty. As a result, exogenous development seeks to attract inward investment from urban growth poles in order to increase rural productivity and add value through intensification, specialisation, and the chemicalisation of agriculture, as well as the electrification and modernisation of infrastructure, and its integration into agribusiness chains (Woods, 2011).

This sectoral and productivist narrative first gained prominence during the post-war period in Western Europe and post-colonial countries (Woods, 2011). Its overarching goal was to increase agricultural output as a means by which to support enhanced food security (van der Ploeg and van Dijk, 1995). According to Lowe et al. (1995), the rural modernisation movement in Europe from the 1950s to the late 1970s can be divided into two phases: the consolidation of agricultural structures and the improvement of agri-infrastructure, followed by the relocation of industrial firms to rural areas and the



enhancement of communication and transport linkages between urban and rural areas. In some socialist countries, such as the USSR, the practice of the exogenous model extended beyond the economic sector to encompass the social sector, and resulted in concentrating rural settlements into new villages or towns as well as the construction of factories in rural areas to transform social and environmental structures (Pallot, 1979).

In the late 1970s, the exogenous model encountered significant obstacles. First, as a productivist approach, it encountered, within many European countries, obstacles to the growth of agricultural production. This, in turn, called into question the economic validity of the modernisation theory as a sectoral policy (van der Ploeg and van Dijk, 1995). Concurrently, the improvements to the built environment brought about by rural modernisation attracted the urban bourgeois to return to rural areas. The bottleneck of growth and counter-urbanisation process challenged the linear development narrative of the exogenous model and facilitated the emergence of the endogenous model, which focused on the place-based enhancement of local resources. Additionally, dominant political ideology underwent a dramatic shift towards neo-liberalism during the worldwide oil, stagflation and debt crises of the 1970s (Bockman, 2013). This shift resulted the emergence of a more fragmented and decentralised governance structure that replaced traditional state-led social governance, which undermined the political foundations of top-down and sectoral exogenous policies whilst fostering a bottom-up development led by local communities (Cejudo and Navarro, 2020). Furthermore, in many Global South regions and countries such as Africa and India, the exogenous model was promoted to reduce agricultural labour and increase economic outputs (Kerr, 2012; Singh and Singh, 2006). However, the urban areas of these late-industrialising countries were unable to absorb the excess labour that was displaced from rural areas, resulting in enhanced social injustices in forms such as land dispossession and a proliferation of urban slums (see, for example, Dhanagare, 1987; Shiva, 1991). In general, implementation of the exogenous model was marked by the extraction of resources and value from rural areas (Lowe et al., 1995). Lowe et al. (1998) suggested that this extraction was underpinned by four features of exogenous approaches: 1) reliance on subsidies and public investment from distant agencies; 2) distorted development that prioritised specific sectors,

settlements or type of business, and disregarded the non-economic values and functions of rural areas and everyday life; 3) erosion of rural socio-cultural and environmental diversity through productivist land consolidation and modernisation initiatives; 4) dictated development visions and plans devised by distant policymakers and experts in economics or planning. These issues, which reflect the marginal position of rural households in socio-economic structures and rural development agendas are more apparent in Global South nations in which the rights of rural populations, and particularly land rights, are often unacknowledged or disregarded (Anseeuw, 2013; Conway and Barbie, 1988; Zhang and Donaldson, 2008).

## *(2) Endogenous development*

In light of these criticisms, the concept of endogenous development was advanced. This, in turn, led to a paradigm shift towards a bottom-up and territorially-focused approach to development in Europe (Ray, 2000). Rather than prioritising sectoral growth, endogenous development adopts a comprehensive approach to development that takes account of the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural conditions and local objectives that exist within a specific place (van der Ploeg and van Dijk, 1995). This approach assigns responsibility for rural development to local communities, because they are considered to possess a superior understanding of local conditions and have a greater claim to local resources than the state or other external actors (Moseley, 1997).

This paradigm shift reflects a post-modern perspective on rural areas in which they are no longer seen as inherently backward, but as socio-culturally diverse spaces that possess unique values and capacities (Ray, 1998). This newfound appreciation for the rural, combined with factors such as rural nostalgia, amenity migration, and the emergence of the eco-economy, has led to the commodification of local resources through activities such as cultural tourism, agri-entertainment, and the development of local agricultural products (McCarthy, 2008; Woods, 2011). The rural has arguably been transforming into a space of consumption (Woods, 2011).

Another key factor that has driven the shift towards endogenous development is the transition from government to governance in rural areas (Bock, 2019). This shift can be

seen to have resulted from the combined effect of multiple forces within Western societies (particularly Europe and America), including social pluralism, neo-liberal decentralisation and deregulation, the liberalisation of trade and investment, and the strengthening of Western civil society (Bellamy and Palumbo, 2017; Goodwin, 1998; Rhodes, 1996). This transition involves the transfer of governance responsibilities from the state to local entities comprised mainly of residents and non-governmental organisations which to possess potential to attain a deeper understanding of community needs and conditions (van der Ploeg and van Dijk, 1995).

It follows that endogenous development places a strong emphasis on community-led initiatives, with a focus on building local capacities through empowerment, participation, and infrastructure investment (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019). The model recognises social exclusion and a lack of community capacity as key challenges to rural development, and aims to address these challenges through community-building initiatives (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019).

The dual discourse of exogenous and endogenous development has been criticised for perpetuating a theoretical dichotomy, and for ignoring the dynamic agency of actor networks in rural development processes (Lowe et al., 1998). Additionally, this thesis argue that both theories have a tendency to become meta-narratives which may oversimplify complex rural development practices and suppress diverse perspectives. As Kuhn (1970) pointed out, paradigm shifts in theories are usually driven by changes in worldviews rather than linear and substantial progression. While the endogenous model of rural development presents a distinct pattern compared to exogenous development, it is not without its own set of challenges, including bureaucratic obstacles in multi-level governance, institutional inefficiency in involving a wide range of public participants (Vázquez-Barquero and Rodríguez-Cohard, 2016), and elite capture (processes being dominated by elite groups) and social exclusion (Bosworth et al., 2016a; Navarro et al., 2016; Shucksmith, 2010). Furthermore, the focus of the endogenous model on enhancing community capacity and promoting community-led development has led to a tendency to exclude or resist involvement from external actors, and particularly those representing the public sector. Consequently, local communities have encountered challenges in

accessing essential resources such as education and healthcare; hindering the overall effectiveness of this model — especially in rural areas that are marginalised (Isserman et al., 2009).

### *(3) Neo-endogenous development*

Regardless of the dichotomy in rural development theories, the boundaries between urban and rural in the real world are increasingly blurred, and the emerging concepts of the “global countryside” (Woods, 2007, p.486) and “planetary urbanisation” (Brenner and Schmid, 2018, p.570) suggest the existence of mosaic rural geography that is shaped and reshaped by both local and global networks. In light of this, a purely endogenous approach that excludes the influence of external actors may be seen as impractical (Ward et al., 2005). Beyond the virtual theoretical dichotomy, Ray (2001) introduced the concept of neo-endogenous development, drawing on the study of rural networked development by Lowe et al. (1995).

Neo-endogenous development is not a policy prescription or theoretical model from the lab, but a practical perspective on the real-world governance of rural development in an increasingly interconnected world in which rural areas are deeply embedded in a ‘space of flows’ (Castells, 1996). As defined by Bosworth et al., (2015, p.3), neo-endogenous development is “based on local resources and local participation but is also characterized by dynamic interactions between local areas and their wider environments”.

In practice, neo-endogenous development emphasises the establishment of actor networks which connect local communities with extra-local actors and external resources (Bosworth et al., 2016a). This approach promotes integration across various levels of governance (e.g., local, regional, supranational), as well as the integration of urban and rural, as well as local and global relations (Gkartzios and Lowe, 2019).

This focus on connecting local with external actors and wider environment distinguishes neo-endogenous development from previous rural development approaches (Table 2.1):

Table 2.1 Exogenous, endogenous, and neo-endogenous development and key characteristics (Source: author's own)

	<b>Exogenous</b>	<b>Endogenous</b>	<b>Neo-endogenous</b>
<b>Imagination of the rural</b>	Space of production	Space of consumption	Space of relations
<b>Force of development</b>	State and urban growth pole	Local communities and enterprises	Local community and other actors within the network/relationships
<b>Main issues of rural development</b>	Lack of productivity	1) Lack of community capacity 2) Social exclusion	1) Lack of community capacity 2) Social exclusion 3) Lack of social connections and networks
<b>Methods of rural development</b>	1) Rural industrialisation, commercialisation, and specialisation 2) New employment and external investment	1) Capacity building in personal skills, governance and physical infrastructure 2) Wide and comprehensive local participation	Social innovation to connect local and extra-local actors and actor-networks
<b>Main challenges in practice</b>	1) Domination of external interest groups and extraction of local value 2) Distant decision-making and lack of local knowledge and focus	1) Lack of external resources, especially mainstream resources 2) Limited capacity in addressing structural issues 3) Elites' capture and extraction of local value	1) Friction between different scales of governance regimes 2) Elite capture, social exclusion, and extraction of local value 3) Lack of participation of local or extra-local actors 4) Mismatch of strategies and local needs

In many studies upon Europe, neo-endogenous development has been perceived as an efficient means by which to decentralise planning and policy implementation for pan-European networks, as well as a way of fostering community empowerment through collaborative public-private-people partnerships (Navarro et al., 2018; Petrick, 2015; Ray, 2006; Shucksmith, 2010). However, the practical application of neo-endogenous approaches has also been challenged by several factors. These include the risk of elitist development and value capture by local and sectoral elites and lobby groups (Katona-

Kovács et al., 2011; Papadopoulou et al., 2011; Zajda, 2014), and insufficient participation of key external actors such as universities (Navarro et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a declining policy preference for innovative territorial development proposals in the context of existing austerity measures (Dax et al., 2016), conflicts between top-down regulatory controls and local decision-making (Navarro et al., 2016; Shucksmith, 2010), and the time-intensive process of adapting to the European Union's new regulatory framework, as seen in initiatives like Local Action Groups in LEADER<sup>2</sup> (Dax et al., 2016). These challenges can make it difficult for rural communities, and particularly marginal ones that may face capacity challenges, to create and retain value from development initiatives.

#### *(4) The networked approach, social innovation, and neo-endogenous development*

In discussions of the solutions to the aforementioned challenges of neo-endogenous development, social innovation has been posited as a crucial component for successful networked development (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Neumeier, 2012). Social innovation is rooted in a relational, networked approach. It is, as noted by Bock (2016), seen as multi-faceted with various interpretations. Originally, it was developed in the context of organisational studies, and was understood as a means of restructuring business practices, work environments, and those external relationships that are crucial to the success of enterprises (Pot and Vaas, 2008; Schumpeter, 1949). Subsequently, sociologists adopted the term to describe the creation and implementation of new and collective improvements in working practices that are rooted in attitudes, norms, goals, behaviours, and knowledge, either at a societal scale (Pol and Ville, 2009; Zapf, 1989; Ogburn, 1964) or within specific communities (Moulaert et al., 2005; Mumford, 2002).

Social innovation is thus not necessarily driven by economic or technological factors and its scope remains open. As Mulgan and Pulford (2010, p.16) summarise: “social innovation describes the processes of invention, diffusion and adoption of new services

---

<sup>2</sup> LEADER is an integrative initiative developed by the European Union. It aims to enhance rural development through localised, community-led strategies. The central principle of LEADER is to involve local actors in the development process, fostering a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down mandate.

or organisational models [...] also describes the outcome — the service or model being developed”.

Studies have identified social capital as the primary outcome of successful social innovation that has effectively alleviated the rural marginalisation (Neumeier, 2017). Bourdieu (1986, p.248) defined social capital as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition [...] to membership in a group”. The concept of social capital that was connected with social class and power function was then re-interpreted by Putnam (1993) into components that underpin regional development, such as trust between citizens, vital voluntary associations and social networks, and the culture of mutual cooperation. Hence, in policy practice, the essence of social innovation can be seen as a collaborative innovation process that fosters new social relationships (BEPA, 2011).

In terms of rural development, this concept emphasises the need to establish relationships that link members of rural communities with external actors, and aligns with the principles of neo-endogenous development (Bosworth et al., 2015).

Building upon the research of Putnam (1995; 2000) and elaborated by Woolcock (2002), three types of social capital can be identified as fundamental to successful networked rural development. The first type is bonding relationships, which exist between individuals with similar interests and strong social bonds, such as relationships within a rural community. The second type is bridging relationships, occurring between individuals with divergent interests and weak ties, exemplified by relationships between local and extra-local actors. Lastly, the third type is linking relationships, referring to the ability to connect with actors within the established system, like governments, banks, and courts, and to access mainstream resources, such as exemptions from planning control, infrastructure, and social security. These relationships aid in the categorising of differentiated rural areas in China, and enable the selection of appropriate study communities (see Chapter Six).

Neumeier’s study (2012, p.58) outlined the key stages of the social innovation process in rural areas. They are summarised as follows:

- Problematisation: a small group of actors recognise the need/problem, prompted by an initial driving force that may be external or internal to the involved actors (such as a threat, distress, emotional concern, or themes of interest). This need leads to the formation of an initial group of actors which seeks to address the identified need. This highlights the significance of an initial driving force, as it is unlikely that actors will choose to cooperate without a compelling reason;
- Expression of interest: as other actors become aware of the advantages of participating, they join the core group of actors;
- Delineation and coordination: the interested actors engage in negotiations regarding the new form of collaborative action/organisation. Skills, knowledge, and expertise are exchanged among the participating actors, and this results in mutual learning. A new form of collaboration is shaped. If the new form of collaboration is accepted and implemented by the majority of participating actors and beyond, and proves to be more effective than traditional forms to meet local demands, it can be considered to be a social innovation.

The framework provides a general theoretical framework by which to understand the collaborative innovation process of networked rural development approaches. It has been used to organise the narrative structure of case studies conducted in China (illustrated in Chapter Six), and facilitates dialogue between Chinese and Western theories of rural development.

Many empirical studies focused on the development of rural areas have discovered that the success of social innovations is rooted in the existence of sustainable and well-balanced actor network that operates at multiple scales (Laschewski and Neu 2004; Magel, 2000). As Bock (2016) contends, the creation of such a collaborative network of actors extending beyond rural areas is crucial for the development of rural regions, and particularly those that are marginalised. In the Global South where policies tend to favour urbanisation, rural areas frequently find themselves relegated to a peripheral role within the local political-economic frameworks, and the marginalisation often deprives rural communities of the necessary stimulus for fostering endogenous growth (Chen et al.,



2022; Liu et al., 2010; Vázquez-Barquero, 2016). They are unable to go it alone. In this context, innovative networking and relationship-building across borders and communities has become the *sine qua non* of development of marginal rural localities.

Bock (2016, p.556) points out that the concept and application of social innovation are rooted in a neo-liberal rural governance structure, in which communities must resort to “self-help” in devolutionary austerity regimes characterised by state withdrawal and the dismantling of welfare states — necessity is the essential trigger.

However, due to the structural deprivation that marginal rural areas often face, rural communities frequently lack such capacities, and this results in a further exacerbation of spatial inequality due to uneven geographic distributions of socio-economic resources (Slee et al., 2022; Xin et al., 2022). In some regions, the use of social innovation has led to the plausible relinquishment of state responsibilities in rural governance and a return to traditional models of mutualism and self-reliance (Bock, 2016). This has prompted debates as to the role and necessity of the public sector. Some studies (and policies) have suggested that the significance of public and social sector actors, including public agencies, social enterprises, and non-governmental organizations in social innovation is equal (e.g., BEPA, 2011; Murray et al., 2010). Copus (2016) contends that in societies with more centralised governance structures and higher levels of trust between the public sector and civil society, the state is more active in supporting the actor network of social innovation.

To enhance the effectiveness of social innovation within the framework of neo-endogenous development, Bock (2016) advances the concept of nexogenous development. While both nexogenous and neo-endogenous development are networked approaches driven by social innovation, the nexogenous approach places emphasis on the structural marginalisation that rural areas face as a consequence of ongoing social changes, such as urbanisation and globalisation. Bock (2016) critiques the self-help orientation of current social innovation practices which may only be helpful to the most resource-rich rural communities, and instead advocates for the nexogenous approach because it prioritises addressing rural marginalisation as a shared societal concern that

should involve structurally-influential actors and mainstream resources, such as the state and nationally-operating large businesses. From the perspective of relationships, the neo-endogenous approach emphasises the importance of establishing bonding and bridging relationships for successful social innovation, while the nexogenous approach highlights the significance of linking relationships. Although Bock did not articulate her nexogenous approach, she effectively conveyed the idea that networked rural development initiatives which seek to promote successful social innovation should involve linking relationships and support from society beyond the community level. This characteristic is also fundamental to NED, yet it is distinctly embedded within China's distinct authoritarian governance framework.

It should be noted, however, that the nexogenous approach is still rooted in a neo-liberal governance context in which many state duties and responsibilities are transferred, especially in the rural sphere, to individuals and the private sector. The implementation of the exogenous approach is likely, in terms of its power dynamic, to exhibit significant similarities with the neo-endogenous approach (Goodwin-Hawkins et al., 2021). Both approaches encourage communities to 'reach-out' in order to connect themselves with external networks within the prevailing political-economic structure in which they are sited. This thesis views the nexogenous approach as an extension of the neo-endogenous approach rather than as a paradigm shift from the exogenous to the endogenous model.

In practice, as the various networked rural development approaches have posed limited challenges to the prevailing self-help neoliberal rural governance structure, it has led to uncertainties in localising the value generated from development. Within this structure, disadvantaged villages can be further marginalised due to reduced direct (state) funding and the provision of public goods; especially in countries operating under austerity regimes (Douglas, 2016). For more advantaged villages, many locally differentiated dynamics such as leadership and embeddedness in supportive networks, can impact the quality of social innovation and hence determine the success or failure of networked approaches (Fischer and McKee, 2017; Richter et al., 2019). Additionally, the sustainability and resilience of community organisations in delivering public tasks have been also called into question, as challenges around social exclusion and elite capture

have been widely observed in practice (Skerratt and Steiner, 2013). The commercial and economic purposes of many community organisations can also divert their attention from delivering public tasks and lead them towards extracting local resources (Aiken et al., 2016).

## **2.2 ‘From government to governance’: social governance changes behind paradigm shifts**

In the preceding section, shifting rural development theories from the exogenous model to the networked approach were reviewed. This section briefly discusses the societal changes that reflexively caused the transition from government to governance, in European countries from the late twentieth century onwards (Palumbo, 2017). In so doing, this section provides a backdrop for comprehending the unique institutional and socio-cultural context in which the networked transition of Chinese rural development is occurring. This thesis does not, however, conduct a cross-national comparative study.

The disparity in governance between Western and Chinese societies stems from differences in their respective state-building processes (Xu, 2022). The state-building process of modern countries has been characterised by the pursuit of “national integration”, which, as conceptualised by Weiner (1965, p. 53), is a “process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national identity”. Mann’s (1984) seminal work on state capacity identifies two types of power: despotic power, which refers to a state’s ability to monopolise violence and enforce its rule over territory and population, and infrastructural power, which refers to a state’s capacity to penetrate grassroots society and implement policies. From this perspective, national integration and the modernisation of early nation-states can be seen as processes of enhancing infrastructural power.

The building of early modern nation states in Europe was marked by the national integration and increasing state capacity (Birch, 2012). Before the Enlightenment and the establishment of modern states, mediaeval Europe comprised a community of fragmented territories dominated by feudal lords, with European societies comprising small communities that were weakly interconnected by Christianity (Qian, 2010). These

territories were not integrated in the manner of contemporary societies, as feudal societies lacked the ability to effectively promote disciplines and norms through centralisation (McRae, 1979). From the sixteenth century onwards, the modern nation-state emerged as the predominant political regime in Europe, and the growth of commercial economies and industrial capitalism further increased the centrality of the state in European societies. During the early post-war period, both Keynesian and Communist welfare states expanded citizens' rights and welfare, with the latter providing relatively lower-quality public goods compared to the former (Cook, 2011). The rapid improvement of socio-economic conditions, coupled with the strong national consensus formed during World War II and the Cold War, resulted in "low profile of social cohesion" (Miształ, 1996, p.4) and rising infrastructural power.

However, the process of national integration has been disturbed by the process of globalisation and the growth of information technology: European social structures have become significantly pluralised and previous nation-states have gradually given way to constellations of heterogeneous social relational networks (Urry, 2000). According to Castells (1996), human society, in which major social functions and processes are organized around networks, has evolved into a network society. This pluralisation process, which first emerged in Western nation-states such as the United States, was described in the 1960s as a "melting pot" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963, p.288), has also appeared in many post-colonial countries (Rabushka and Shepsle, 2009).

As a result of these shifts, European societies have become more atomised and the common values and trust of traditional European society that were established before the twentieth century and reinforced by the Second World War, have been at least partially weakened (Elchardus and De Keere, 2010; Powell, 2000). The socio-institutional foundations of previous national integration efforts that were built upon national state governing have been challenged in several aspects. First, in terms of their effectiveness in policy formulation and implementation, social pluralism has challenged the traditional top-down approach of governments relying on bureaucratic systems to govern people (Rhodes, 1997). In addition, the economic crises that have persisted since the 1980s, coupled with the rise of neo-liberalism as a dominant political ideology, have destabilised

the physical and institutional structure of post-war national integration and led to a significant reduction in state involvement in the delivery of public services. This shift has been driven by the principles of neo-liberalism, which advocates for deregulation, privatisation, and individualist self-help culture (Gerrard, 2017). Consequently, traditional forms of consensus, solidarity, and standards on issues such as modernisation, religion, family, state, norms, and class have been eroded, and public awareness of the precarious nature of citizenship rights has grown (Misztal, 1996). Moreover, the growth of supranational organizations, such as the European Union, has reshaped the role of the traditional nation-state. This process of rescaling has sparked interest in multi-level governance which enables supranational, national, sub-national, and non-governmental actors to collaborate in the formulation and delivery of policies (Bovaird, 2005). Against this background, Rhodes (1997) contend that governance could be redefined as self-organising networks that operate independently of states.

Regarding rural development, although Castell's (1996) theory of networked society suggests that rural areas are geographically distant from the organising centres of networks, Murdoch (2000) has highlighted the specific usefulness of networks in understanding the social changes and various manifestations of development in rural areas. The historical phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration in Europe, which took place particularly during the 100 years after 1820, saw rapid urbanisation that restructured rural socio-demographic profiles (Bairoch and Goertz, 1985). For instance, the number of cities with populations of over 5,000 inhabitants grew by 34% by around 1830s, with London alone boasting a population of over 1.5 million (Bairoch and Goertz, 1985). Additionally, between 1865 and 1914, as many as 36 to 39 million Europeans emigrated to overseas colonies, driven by factors such as increasing population density and economic opportunities (Bairoch and Goertz, 1985). This wave of migration resulted in significant population and community losses across rural Europe. During the same time period, rural China was grappling with the issue of overpopulation leading to over-densification and resultant poverty; a problem that persists to this day (Huang, 2002). This demographic situation has created a significant barrier to integrating the hundreds of millions of rural populations into urban-industrial economic sectors, a challenge that is likely to continue

both now and in the foreseeable future (Wen, 2021). As captured by Tawney's most famous metaphor, the Chinese rural resident is likened to "a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him" (Tawney, 1932: p.77). This vivid imagery underscores the precarious nature of life for many in rural China, where minimal disturbances can have disproportionately large impacts, thus highlighting the significance of sustaining social stability in these areas. The long-standing rural impoverishment renders the maintenance of rural social stability a crucial task for the central authorities of China, including successive CPC regimes (for more discussions, see Section 3.1).

The trend of European urbanisation persisted in the 1950s, and led to the implementation of exogenous development models which sought to boost agricultural output in order to address the food crises brought on by booming urban populations and the destruction wrought by the second world war (Woods, 2011). The 1970s saw further significant socio-economic changes within rural Europe, with two primary forces being responsible.

Firstly, the growth of manufacturing and service industries in rural areas was facilitated by the relocation of urban manufacturing plants to rural areas where there were lower rents and wages (Murdoch, 2006). This inward investment stimulated the need for professional or business services, and led to the expansion of the rural service economy, as well as mushrooming small enterprise growth (Lowe et al., 1995). Additionally, advancements in rural education and health services under welfare state regimes created new job opportunities (for workers) and labour market opportunities (for employers).

Secondly, the uptick in urban-to-rural migration, i.e., counter-urbanisation, caused a pluralisation of rural societies. The urban bourgeoisie, often seeking retreat to the bucolic countryside, relocated to rural localities and altered the traditional rural social structure from a *Gemeinschaft*, namely extended family group with rich bonding relationships (Tönnies, 1887, quoted by Misztal, 1996), to a *Gesellschaft* characterised by more profit- and power-driven linking and bridging relationships (Murdoch, 2006). While this change did not represent a binary shift between these two social paradigms which actually hybridised with each other in reality, it reflected the general transition towards pluralism.

Wittel (2001) introduced the concept of network sociality to describe this transformation, which could be viewed as being opposite to the idea of community. He argued that this new sociality in rural communities could be disintegrated from traditional communities built on stability, proximity, consensus, belonging, embeddedness, common history, and collective narratives, as it produced individualised identities and networks.

This social pluralism was foundational to the shift from government to governance in rural Europe, which then led to the paradigm shift from exogenous to (neo-) endogenous models (Bock, 2019). There was a growing consensus that rural development ought to be based on local resources and quality, rather than government-led, top-down, exogenous interventions (Ward et al., 2005). Consequently, (neo-) endogenous development became prevalent as an alternative to exogenous development policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy.

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis further exacerbated the financial situation of many countries, and led to the further devolution of state responsibilities to local communities (Young, 2016). In an age of austerity, more public funding was redirected to urban growth poles and brought about cuts in funding for most rural areas as well as a decline in public services, employment opportunities, and population levels (Bock et al., 2016; Scott, 2013).

In response to these political issues and institutional deficiencies, community organisations have proliferated in rural Europe. Although these organisations may be referred to by different names in different regions, such as social enterprises and cooperatives, they are commonly non-governmental bodies that take a degree of responsibility for policy design, implementation, and the delivery of many public services, including housing, transportation, environmental conservation, and community development (van Twuijver et al., 2020; Richter et al., 2019). By collaborating with local governments and other extra-local actors, rural communities in Europe have adopted networked approaches to address the neo-liberal power void within rural governance. At the same time, local governments in countries facing serious austerity and neo-liberal governance shifts such as the UK have become increasingly reliant on community organisations to deliver hitherto public tasks (Bock, 2019).

While the interplay of these endogenous and exogenous forces has resulted in the detraditionalization of many European societies (for further, see Elchardus and Keere, 2010; Murdoch, 2006) and has driven the transition from government to governance in networked societies (Bock, 2019), this does not imply the disappearance of infrastructural power, for this has been upheld by states through the establishment of rigorous formal bureaucratic institutions at the grassroots level (Huang, 1993). Neither the delivery capacity nor information and leadership capacity of states has been diminished by state withdrawal and the networked shift of rural governance, but has arguably been supplemented by the rise of territorial collaborative partnerships.

In general, this chapter has charted the progression of prevailing international rural development theories from exogenous development to networked development. It reveals that the social governance context that includes socio-economic shifts, salient political challenges, and corresponding institutional frameworks have profoundly influenced the establishment and metamorphosis of rural development paradigms. This insight underscores the fact that in order to craft a theoretical framework for the rural networked development approach of Xi administration, what this thesis calls neo-exogenous development (NED), it is imperative to first understand the unique history and status quo of the social governance context of China.

The social governance context in which NED has gestated and been applied differs significantly from that of the Western context, despite certain superficial similarities. In contrast to Western countries, China is a huge and populous country that has a two millennia history of centralised and arguably authoritarian bureaucratic administration. While China exhibits high despotic power, it has lower infrastructural power to formally manage the grassroots society than its Western counterparts, owing to the limited central control that is exercised over the vast territory (Huang, 2008a). Additionally, China's capital accumulation for the industrialisation and urbanisation processes were promoted by the Communist Party of China (CPC) through an urban-rural dualist socio-political resource distribution system and an authoritarian party-state system (Wen, 2009). These



factors dictate that China's state-building and the subsequent process of national integration predominantly revolve around the critical task of “rural integration” — the effort by the central authority to incorporate the vast and diverse rural regions of China into a unified, cohesive, and centrally governed entity (Xu, 2022, p.5).

This study contends that these intertwined historical trajectories of Chinese social governance have given rise to significant cultural and institutional legacies. These legacies have shaped the double logics which underpin the concept of NED. One facet of this logic is anchored in historical nuances, and takes its cues from China's unique state-society relationship which exhibit rural integration and clientelist governance through intermediaries (i.e., gentries, village cadres etc.). The other is contemporary, and is reflective of the party-state system and the prevailing urban-rural dualist governance and its restructuring process.

These logics are examined in Chapters Three and Four which discuss the socio-institutional context of Chinese rural development and governance, including the nature of China's central-local relationships, and system of grassroots bureaucracy, as well as the country's rural development and governance history, which encompasses the interplay of historic rural governance legacy and the emerging rural restructuring process. This analysis draws attention to the distinct social governance context of NED, and demonstrates why the existing mainstream rural development paradigms cannot be simply appropriated to conceptualise Chinese rural development practice, whilst also providing readers with background knowledge by which to understand the institutional framework of NED.

## **Chapter Three: The Superstructure of Chinese Rural Governance: Central-Local Party-State Bureaucracy, Urban-Rural Relations and Growth Machine**

The review of Western rural development theories in Chapter Two indicates that the paradigm shifts in rural development are contingent on the social governance context at a particular time and place. From a historical perspective, the Chinese social governance system has been very different from its European counterparts, particularly in terms of state-building processes, the relationships that exist between state and society and, from that, role of central authority. For instance, as noted by Huang (2019), a renowned historian of Chinese legal and social history, traditional Chinese social governance is characterised by a high degree of despotic power and a lack of infrastructural power within grassroots society. It follows, that to conceptualise NED, it is necessary to first understand the governance structure in which this emerging state-led rural development paradigm was initiated and implemented.

This chapter analyses social governance system of China and focuses on its unique bureaucratic system as well as the nature of its urban-rural relations. Through so doing, the chapters determine the reasons why current European-Western theories cannot be simply appropriated to conceptualise Chinese rural development practices, by answering the research question: How does the existing Chinese social governance system differ from that of Western countries? Section 3.1 delves into the central-local party-state structure of China and its historic consistency, and the ensuing urban growth machine that emerged after the 1980's Open Reforms. Section 3.2 then analyses the country's urban-rural dualist governance structure, and provides insights into the institutional background of Chinese rural marginalisation.

### **3.1 From Indigenous origins or foreign influences? The Logic of China's party-state-led social governance system**

*(1) The Historic consistency of China's social governance structure*

Many studies have highlighted the significant roles played by both the central and local party-states in the social governance and rural development of China (Chen, 2019; Shen, 2020). This section primarily examines the party-state bureaucratic system which has given rise to the distinctive urban-rural relationships and issues of rural marginalisation which presently exist in China.

Within extant literature on the logic of Chinese social governance, two divergent perspectives pertaining to the influence of the country's unique party-state apparatus exist. The first presents China as a communist and totalitarian party state, in which urban-rural society is subject to the control and coercion of pervasive party-state forces, and traditional rural cultural norms have undergone significant transformation as a result of the communist revolution and Maoist Rural Collectivisation Movement (1950s-1978). This perspective has been further advocated since the beginning of the Xi administration through power having been gradually centralised (Feldman, 2021; Sagers, 2020).

The second, in contrast, is derived from Deng Xiaoping's market-oriented Open Reform which has triggered debates surrounding the occurrence of a neo-liberal transition within the national governance structure. This transition is characterised by the increasing involvement of the state in utilising market-based instruments (Harvey, 2005; Zhou et al., 2019). The neo-liberal perspective, which is particularly popular in the fields of urban planning and geography, has gained traction in rural areas following the state's withdrawal from rural governance during the early stage of the Open Reform (1980s-early 2000s). Concepts such as urban growth machine and state entrepreneurship have been widely used to describe the urban-rural governance and development activities in China (Zhang and Wu, 2008). Based on the neo-liberal features of the governance agenda, some scholars started to link the increasing participation of local actors in the NRRS framework to (neo-) endogenous paradigms (see, for instance, Li et al., 2019; Qin et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2018; Zhang and Zhang, 2018).

This thesis posits that the application of orthodox neo-liberal or totalitarian theories to understand Chinese rural and social governance structure is not appropriate. Contrary to common Communist/Leninist totalitarianism, the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and

the subsequent Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the peak of the Chinese communist revolution, were characterised by significant decentralisation rather than centralisation. Commenting further, Wang (2018) highlights a substantial transfer of administrative and fiscal power during this period, with local governments assuming control over the majority of state-owned enterprises; their share of public revenue increased to 65% of the national total by 1966 (Xu, 2011). The proportion of revenue flowing to local governments reached a peak at 88% in 1975 during the Cultural Revolution (Zhou, 2004).

Regarding the neo-liberal transition, as Harvey (2006) notes, China is a unique case in which elements of both neo-liberalism and authoritarianism coexist. In his analysis, Wu (2018) further challenges the notion of neo-liberalism as a political ideology, and argues that the centralisation of control in Chinese governance is not simply a remnant of communism or a deviation from global neo-liberal trends. Rather, he suggests, it stems from the central government's goal of creating a "market society" (Wu, 2018, p.1095). By flagging this concept, he contends that the combination of authoritarian control, regional decentralisation, and state entrepreneurialism was a result of the shift towards market-based accumulation in the 1980s, and that governmental control has served to remove barriers to state-led capitalisation and maintain social stability. This view is in keeping with the accumulative mechanism that Hechter (1977, p.8) called "internal colonialism", which refers to the processes by which developing countries establish a domestic centre-periphery structure to extract resources and surplus value from under-developed or traditional industrial sectors, in order to support the primitive accumulation of modern capitalist industrial sectors, and in which the rural sector often serves as the periphery.

While Wu's (2018) model of Chinese social governance logic has contributed to the de-ideologization of the topic, its orientation towards creating a market society whilst also promoting economic growth, has been primarily stimulated by the Open Reform, the institutional foundation of which has gradually changed over recent years (Lardy, 2019; Leutert and Eaton, 2021). This model may not provide an effective explanation for emerging policy shifts since the Xi administration from 2013. One such shift is the focus on the "the calculation on politics" (算政治账) (Xinhua News, 2022, para.2) rather than

mere economic accounts in pandemic control policies or the broader governance objectives in NRRS. These policy objectives are beyond mere economic growth and 'value for money.' They include, for instance, the construction of environmental-friendly "ecological civilisation" (Zhang and Wu, 2022, p.1069), and the promotion of public participation and heritage conservation through "micro-regeneration" (Wu et al., 2022, p.609), and the enhancement of political loyalty to the central party-state authority through societal party-building campaign (Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2018; Shen et al., 2020). In addition, despite its great theoretical value, the author argues that this model has not completely addressed the historic persistence of many elements within China's governance structure which predate the emergence of modern market economy, state-led industrialisation, and concomitant primitive accumulation.

This thesis contends that instead of adopting Western theories to comprehend China's social governance structure, there is a need to trace the indigenous historical origins of Chinese governance model. The differences in governance structures between China and the West originate from their distinct processes of state building (Xu, 2022; Zhao, 2015; Zhou, 2019). As early as 221 BC, China had established its first centralised imperial regime with a sophisticated system of bureaucracy. This marked the start of China's state-building and rural integration process with rural households being converted from feudal tenants to imperial subjects (Zhou, 2020). To effectively manage the vast empire, local governments at each level were equipped with bureaucratic departments that were similar to those of the central government, and had the purpose of delivering the emperor's orders and reinforcing central supervision of local affairs (as illustrated in Figure 3.1). While local governments were designed to function as self-sustaining administrative units and endowed with high levels of discretion with regards to both local administrative affairs, and responsibilities for the delivery of public tasks, the promotion of local officials was centrally controlled (Xu, 2011).

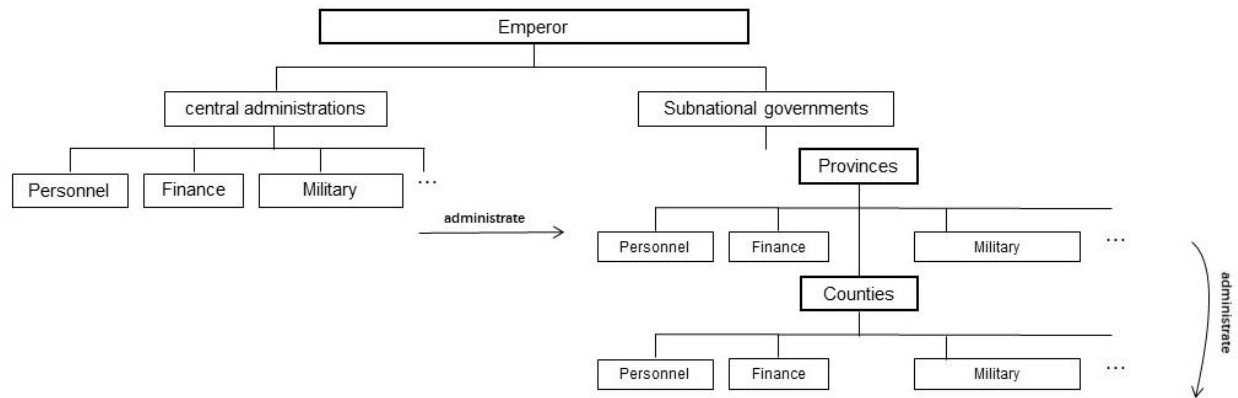


Figure 3.1 Chinese bureaucratic structure in ancient China (Source: Author's own)

Instead of being derived from Weber's (1978) theories on modern bureaucracy which are characterized by formal rules and rationality, existing central-local relationships in China can be traced back to the Imperial Era; indicating their deep historical origins. Notable theoretical frameworks which have addressed this relationship include the M-form company proposed by Xu (1993), Chinese fiscal federalism explored by Qian and Weingast (1997), and regionally decentralized authoritarianism by Xu (2011). It follows, that theories such as the neo-traditionalism model (Walder, 1988), may overemphasize the socio-cultural and ideological differences between pre- and post-Communist Chinese society. Figure 3.2 illustrates how the present bureaucratic system bears a striking resemblance to its historical predecessor and features a five-tier sub-national governmental structure.

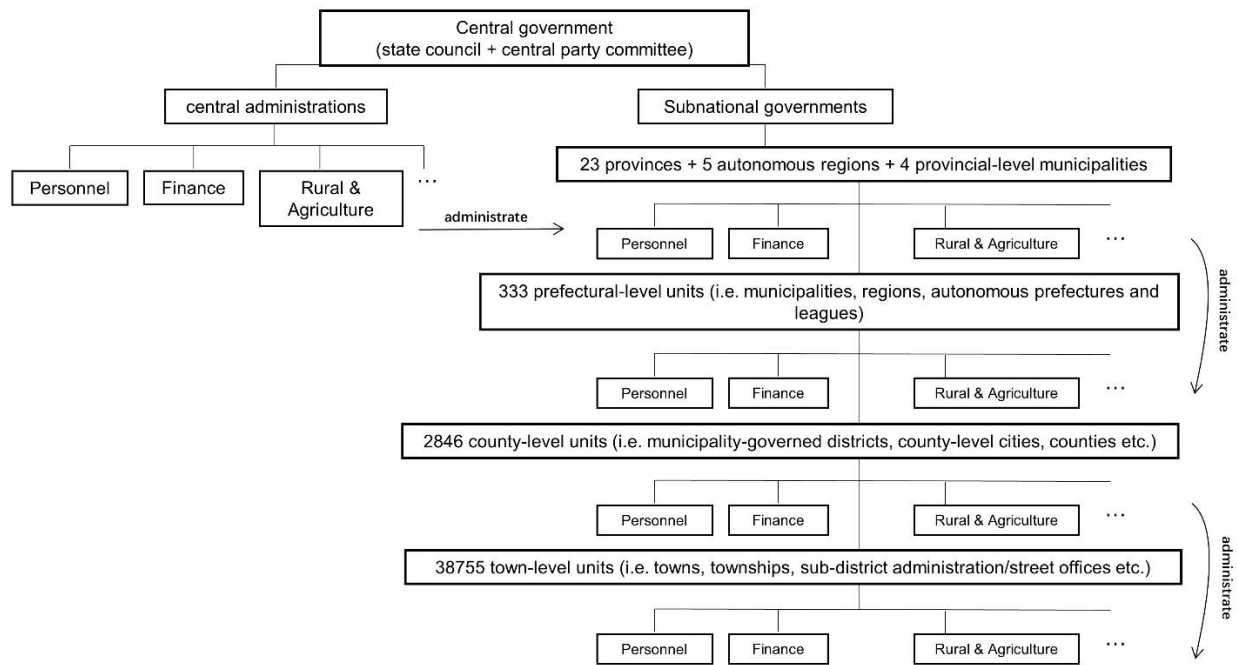


Figure 3.2 The bureaucratic structure of modern China (Source: Author's own, based on data from NBS, 2021a)

*(2) Towards unity and integration: Chinese party-state system and national integration*

A crucial distinction between imperial and modern China is the inclusion of multi-level party committees, which has empowered the central authority to oversee the bureaucracy and extend its influence into grassroots community-level governance. This arrangement serves to promote rural integration and political centralisation. The extensive party network in China has transformed the country from a dynasty state to a party state (党政体制) (Shue, 2018). This thesis contends that the party-state system constitutes one of the primary logics that underpin the governance structure within which NED operates.

The Chinese party-state is a unique and defining aspect of the country's political and social structure. Within many Western democracies, a multi-party system exists which is characterised by episodic rotations in governance positions with ruling parties being transient entities, rather than structural constants. Such parties primarily seek to turn their

electoral manifestos into actionable policies and serve as reservoirs of talents for governments, whilst retaining electoral-centric identities. In stark contrast, the CPC is an entity that transcends normative party or governmental delineations. Jing et al., (2016) identified six nuanced strategies through which the CPC seamlessly embeds itself into both state and social fabric. These are summarised by the author as follows:

- Setting party groups within non-party organisations: the central and local party committees can set party groups (党组) as branches in private social associations and governmental institutions such as the State Council, the National People's Congress (the highest legislative authority), the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) (the highest political advisory body), and the Supreme People's Court (highest judicial authority).
- Centralised management under party organs (归口管理): it involves central and local party committees operating through specific departments. These party departments are responsible for leading and overseeing relevant state functional departments, effectively centralising control and decision-making processes. For instance, the Publicity Department of the Central CPC Committee leads central state authorities such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the Ministry of Education, as well as state-affiliated but non-governmental entities such as the People's Daily, and the China Academy of Social Science.
- Setting high-level "Leading Groups": the Leading Groups (领导小组) are either permanent or temporary leadership groups which are directly under the central or local party committee. They wield significant power, and often surpass their designated coordination roles. For example, the Central Leading Group of Rural Work (CLGRW) is the centre of China's policy-making system in the sector of agricultural modernisation and rural governance.
- Party leaders holding state positions (党政兼职): for instance, the head of the CLGRW is a vice premier of the State Council and also a commissar of the CPC Central Political Bureau.



- Dual identity for single institutions (一套班子, 两块牌子): While the party operates many committees and working groups that exert influence and decision-making power on state affairs, not all these entities are formally recognised in state structures. By wearing two hats, these entities can manoeuvre within both party and state systems, and thereby ensure a seamless intertwining of party directives with state functions. This dual identity can also be found in those state institutions that have multifunctional roles. For instance, in the case of Fruit MAZ (Chapter Nine), the management committee have two identities (the MAZ and a tourism resort zone), with the two entities overlapping in terms of geography and functions.
- Joint office operations (合署办公): party organs operate jointly with governmental departments, with the party's entity taking precedence.

The legitimacy of China's party-state regime is not rooted in intangible communist ideology based on Marxism or Leninism (Chen, 2005). Instead, as many scholars in China studies have argued, it draws upon a utopian vision that is rooted in ancient Chinese Confucianist thought, and seeks a great unity society (大同社会/*datong*) (Dessein, 2017; Bell, 2023). The concept of the great unity society advocates for an active interventionist government which is committed to the well-being of its populace — termed as *ren zhen* (仁政) — and the maintenance of traditional patriarchist social orders such as those that exist between sovereign and subjects or fathers and children, known as *li shu* (礼数) (Dessein, 2017). In the envisioned great unity society, individuals are capable of appreciating the culture and values of diverse groups as if they were their own; signalling an aspirational intent for a harmonious yet non-homogeneous society (Fei, 2000; Huang, 2014).

This vision aligns with the socio-political context in which Confucian scholars first formulated the concept between the Spring and Autumn (770-481 BC) and the Warring States periods (481 - 221 BC) (Pines et al., 2021). During this period, the collapse of Zhou Dynasty, a loose state alliance, led to endless interstate wars and social instability (Zhao, 2015). At that time, Confucian scholars did not offer an effective governance methodology

to end the wars and achieve great unity society. Finally, in 221 BC, the Qin Dynasty united the warring states, and through so doing instituted the inaugural imperial governance structure over what is now recognised as Chinese territory. This highly centralised form of imperial rule, which was centred around the authority of emperor, then emerged as the first viable governance model in China by which to halt interstate conflicts, integrate political-economic and socio-culturally discrete societies and communities, and finally advance towards the ideal of a great unity society (Pines, 2000). Thereafter, this governance model featured by the integration of society into imperial state authority, has become a predominate method for approaching great unity society. It has been perpetuated by successive dynasties in the past two thousand years. In the authoritarian imperial regime, the ideology behind building the great unity society essentially embodies a value judgment from the others, replete with a top-down gaze of power, and the expectations that rulers have for their subjects, rather than bottom-up pluralism (Jiang, 2010).

It is worth noting that even after the 19<sup>th</sup>-century period of colonial ports and Westernisation, the great unity society continued to be frequently cited by the country's top leadership as an objective for governance (Zhang and Hu, 2017). These endeavours have formed part of a state-building process designed to transform post-colonial and post-war China from an agricultural society that was fractured by war, regional separatism, and uneven industrialisation and urbanisation into a cohesive modern nation-state (Wang, 2014). As Xu (2022) notes, a significant proportion of these efforts have been concentrated in rural areas, which still constitute over half of China's population and land mass. Consequently, rural integration — which refers to the assimilation or incorporation of rural regions into the broader socio-economic and political fabric of the state apparatus — stands as a central element of China's strategy for national integration (Xu, 2022).

Since assuming power in 1950, the CPC's party-state government has undertaken concerted efforts to promote 'national integration', through domains such as minority affairs, economic development, and urban-rural grassroots governance (Huang, 2014; Liu, 1991; Naughton and Yang, 2004; Tsang and Men, 2016). The pursuit of social integration towards great unity society is evident in the key political visions of leading

figures in the CPC; from Mao Zedong's Great Unity of Chinese People (中国人民大团结) (Mao, 1949), to Hu Jintao's Harmonious Society (和谐社会) (Guo and Guo, 2008), and most recently, Xi Jinping's Community for Shared Future for Mankind (人类命运共同体) (Hayes, 2020; Zhang and Li, 2017) as well his initiative for creating a Harmonious and Beautiful Countryside (和美乡村) (People's Daily, 2022) (for details of these political visions, please see the Glossaries). Specifically, Xi (2023) has explicitly highlighted that millennia of historical evolution have created China's unique social governance paradigms, and that they are based on a grand integration (大一统). This grand integration, as Smith (2021) contends, integrates all regions, sectors, and actors in pursuit of a great unity society.

Rather than intangible communist ideology, the legitimacy of the party-state regime is anchored in more tangible outputs which seek to build a great unity society (Heberer and Göbel, 2011). In the era of globalisation and industrialisation, the realisation of the Confucian great unity society necessitates a strategic focus on tangible industrial development as a competitive imperative in the global marketplace. This forms the material bedrock upon which the aspirational great unity society can be constructed (Lin, 2011). Consequently, since the Open Reform in the 1980s, the CPC has recalibrated its governance priorities, and has situated economic growth at the epicentre of efforts directed towards national integration and, by extension, the realisation of the great unity society (Chang, 1996). The instrumental value of economic vitality for rural integration has been particularly manifested in rural contexts. For instance, a great number of rural households have been subsumed into state-led urbanisation in the form of migrant workers (Liu, 1991). Additionally, rural integration has been facilitated through social security and public service provisions which, though limited, have attenuated farmers' dependency on local non-party-state forces whilst also strengthening their reliance on the party-state apparatus (Xu, 2022).

While the urban-industrial growth has formed the key foundation of the legitimacy of Chinese party-state regime, the pro-growth governance agenda stimulated by the central government since 1980s should be distinct from neo-liberal market society characterised

by the pursuit of maximal earnings, the glorification of affluence, and the culture of consumption (Heberer and Göbel, 2011). This argument is consonant with the escalating scholarly trend in the domain of Chinese urban governance, wherein concepts entrenched in Western neoliberal thought, such as state entrepreneurialism, have undergone critical re-evaluation and subsequent sublation (Peck, 2023; Wu; 2023; Wu et al., 2022). However, the Chinese party-state government's emphasis on economic development has subliminally linked the legitimacy of the regime to economic performance (Zhu, 2011), and has resulted in a central-local administrative and financial system that are centred around economic growth.

*(3) Chinese central-local governmental relationships and governance features: administrative subcontracting and political tournament*

Given its unique party-state system, the administrative and financial relationships which exist between central and local governments within China further distinguish the country from its Western counterparts (Qian and Weingast, 1997). It is important to note that central government retains supreme power and possesses the authority to intervene in local affairs, and that the boundary of power between central and local governments is quite vague (Qian and Weingast, 1997). Furthermore, the proportion of central fiscal expenditure as a percentage of overall national expenditure is significantly lower to typical levels observed in Western federalist countries (Xu, 2011). During the early 2000s, sub-national governments in China were responsible for over 70% of national expenditure, whereas in the United States and Germany, the percentages stood at 46% and 40% respectively (Xu, 2011). As of 2020, the proportion of sub-national government spending as a percentage of total expenditure had risen to 85.7% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). However, local revenue accounted for only approximately 54% of the national total; a scenario which resulted in severe debt issues (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b).

Regarding the distinctiveness of the Chinese party-state, this thesis considers the seminal theories of administrative sub-contracting system (行政发包制) and political tournament (政治锦标赛) by Zhou (2016) to effectively exemplify the operational logic of

the present-day Chinese social governance system. Zhou theorised a hybrid governance structure that blends hierarchical bureaucracy and subcontracting institutions. Under this subcontracting system, local governments (as contractors) retain *de facto* ownership of assets and resources (such as state-owned land) and wield certain discretion in territorial development, while being required to pay a set price (i.e., achieved via fixed revenue targets) to the central state (as outsourcer).

The “administrative subcontracting system” (Zhou, 2016, p.51) enables the central party-state to achieve integration and control over local administrations across the country through three key measures: 1) centralised administrative power distribution, 2) centralised fiscal allocation (governmental budget and taxation), and 3) centralised performance assessment/personnel management of officials within party-state bureaucratic system. With regard to the first, and unlike equal relationships in modern enterprises, this subcontracting system operates within a hierarchical and imbalanced power relationship, in which central government retains formal and supreme authority in administrative affairs, and holds the ultimate right to control the *value* generated from local development (Zhou, 2016). Local governments, however, are motivated by “high-powered incentives”: they can retain the value generated above their contracted fiscal quota (i.e., anything above what is owed to the central government) (Zhou, 2016, p.36). As Zhou (2022) argues, while the Western democratic system and modern bureaucratic system share a common foundation through their emphasis on the legitimacy of equality before rules and laws, traditional authority (i.e., historic imprints from imperial China) seeks to uphold hierarchical orders based on adherence to tradition, while charismatic authority (i.e., CPC party state system) focuses on a leader's charm and followers' obedience, both of which are difficult to reconcile with legitimacy based on abstract rules such as social equality, democracy, and the rule of law (Zhou, 2022). In short, the highly centralised and hierarchical administrative structure of the Chinese party-state governmental system endows the central government with supreme control over local government and intervention forces.

With regards to the second mechanism and with reference to budget allocations, the 1994 Tax-sharing Fiscal Reform (for details, see Appendix A) mandated that 70% of value-

added tax would be transferred from local government to the central government, whilst reducing local government's reliance on, and political influence over, local commercial banks which had served as sources of local finance (Tsui and Wang, 2004). Constrained by reduced fiscal and borrowing discretion, local governments at various levels increasingly rely on central transfer payments to govern their jurisdictions (Jin, 2017).

With regards to the third measure, within the administrative subcontracting system, the personnel appointment and promotion of local officials primarily depends on performance assessments undertaken by higher-level governments, rather than bottom-up democratic elections. This arrangement enables the central government to intervene in the governance and development agendas of local governments through cascading performance assessments. Consequently, local government officials are compelled to engage in lateral competition to gain the recognition of higher-level authorities if they are to achieve potential promotion.

Scholars studying Chinese governance widely refer to this competitive promotion mechanism as a political tournament (Zhou, 2004). The term encompasses a tournament-like dynamic which involves officials competing against each other to demonstrate their loyalty, competence, and achievements in order to attract the attention and support of higher-ranking officials (Zhou, 2004). This theory elucidates many phenomena observed in Chinese urban-rural governance, including intense inter-area competition, local protectionism, and the duplication of projects and investments (Zhou, 2007). Since the 1980s Open Reform, economic growth has occupied a significant position within the performance assessment criteria for officials (Zhou, 2007). The political tournament also led to the well-researched campaign-style governance (运动式治理) of China, which is characterised by short-term, intensive, and mobilised efforts which seek to achieve specific policy objectives (Graeme, 2018; Luo et al., 2019). This campaign-style governance has also been observed by this study in the implementation of MAZ policy.

It is, however, also important to note that while the concept of administrative subcontracting system and political tournament have frequently been employed as a means by which to account for the pro-growth urban regime since the 1980s, these

features of Chinese bureaucracy can be dated back to the imperial age (Zhou, 2022). Therefore, we should not think that the current social governance system led by the CPC, which shared significant similarities with the historical structure, is to serve mere economic growth. As with other nations, China's governance objectives are multifaceted, with social integration and stability arguably playing a particularly crucial role (Wang, 2015; Steinhardt and Litao, 2014; Shirk, 2008). As Deng Xiaoping said, "Stability overwhelms everything"(稳定压倒一切) (Sandby-Thomas, 2014, p.47). It is incorrect to overly emphasise economic indicators such as GDP as the sole determinants of governance goals since the 1980s Open Reform (Knight, 2016). Studies on the rationales behind the performance evaluation and promotion of officials, as well as the significance of non-economic indicators such as social stability in the political tournament, substantiate this perspective (Gao, 2015; Shih et al., 2012).

This thesis argues that a significant contribution of the existing social governance system is enabling the central government to effectively implement control over local governments. First, the subcontracting system perpetuates a hierarchical administrative power structure and ensures central government's ultimate claim on local economic resources. Second, and operating within a centralised fiscal framework, the central authority wields considerable discretion over local budgetary allocations, and can therefore channel local governance through budget adjustments and fiscal transfers in order to ensure the implantation of central directives. Third, by leveraging the confluence of the party-state, the central authority tightly manages personnel appointments to local government and employs performance evaluations to motivate the realisation of central visions. These measures reflect the ethos of a great unity society within central-local governmental relations — eradicating contention between different levels of government and ensuring a unified, stable operation under central leadership.

#### *(4) Challenges of party-state governance: fragmented local governance, inter-governmental rat race, and urban growth machine*

The party-state-led social governance system of China has indeed sustained socio-economic growth and political stability, but it has also introduced several challenges to

rural development. First, China's local governance is fragmented and uncoordinated, a phenomenon often referred to as *tiao-kuai* segregation (条块分割)<sup>3</sup>. The current governance system creates a complex network of bureaucratic layers, where vertical governance (representing hierarchical government structures from the central to the local level) intersects with horizontal governance (representing different functional departments or blocks). The result is a matrix-like framework where various 'strips' (sectors or vertical elements) and 'blocks' (departments or horizontal elements) of governance operate both independently and in conjunction with each other. For instance, in terms of rural development, transfer payments and administrative power are largely controlled by various local departments (i.e., agriculture, planning, development and reform etc.), while personnel and the ultimate decision-making power of local affairs are assigned to local government leaders, such as party secretaries, who must reconcile fragmented resources across various departments which are naturally inclined to prioritise their own departmental interests (Chen and Zhang, 2006).

Secondly, and in order to succeed in the political tournament, local officials tend to amplify the key targets set by upper-level government in order to compete with their colleagues and demonstrate their success during their term of office (usually 3-5 years) (Zhou et al., 2015). In the pursuit of these amplified objectives, short-term economic targets such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and industrial added value have dominated performance assessments since the 1980s Open Reform (Li and Zhou, 2005). These indicators are highly prioritised by local governments, and there is often an imperative to exceed the mandates set by higher-level authorities (Zhou, 2022). To overfulfill such economic objectives, as Zhou et al., (2013, p.123) argue, these pragmatic behavioural patterns within the Chinese bureaucratic system exhibit characteristics akin to “muddling through”, “exhibiting a course of action that focuses on short-run, incremental gains; and making sequential adjustments in strategy as conditions change [...] leads to patterns of shifting paths of action over time”. Given the intense pressure to capture the attention of higher-

---

<sup>3</sup> Kuai (块) refers to the horizontal line of authority over a certain territory (e.g., a municipality or county), while tiao (条) refers to the vertical lines of authority over sectoral management (e.g., natural resource, agriculture, finance etc.) from central state administrative agencies.



level government, inter-local governmental competition has transformed into an unrelenting rat race (Zhou, 2022). Rural areas have been subject to 'higher will' and have become arenas of political ambition for local officials (Shen, 2020).

Thirdly, the combination of heavy public expenditure, the pressure of competition, and limited within-budget revenue has given rise to pro-growth state entrepreneurialism in which local governments act as entrepreneurs to generate the local revenue needed to bridge the gap between public expenditure and revenue (Chien, 2013; Su et al., 2012; Wu, 2018). In the context of rural development, this pro-growth model exerts its influence through the "land finance" institution (土地财政) operated by local governments (Qun et al., 2015, p.432).

Numerous studies have provided explanations for the operational mechanism of land finance which effectively integrates rural development activities into a land-driven urban growth machine (Huang and Chan, 2018; Pan et al., 2022; Wen, 2021; Zhao and Webster, 2011). In the land finance institution, China's local governments acquire rural land at low prices, convert it into state-owned construction land, and invest in infrastructure to attract developers and enterprises. Subsequently, local governments capitalise on their monopoly over state-owned land resources by increasing the prices of commercial and residential land upon their release to developers. Moreover, the government utilises the revenue generated from the real estate market, along with low-cost industrial land, to subsidise manufacturing enterprises and enable them to more effectively compete in the global market and facilitate export activities. A process which also generates foreign exchange. In turn, this foreign exchange strengthens the state's capacity to sustain monetary expansion and extend loans to local governments. Additionally, and in order to manage the financial and developmental aspects of the land finance on behalf of local governments, a range of local government financing vehicles (LGFVs) have been established. These state-owned enterprises assume responsibility for mortgage and financing, fixed-asset investment, and urban (re-) development, as well as the operational oversight of state-owned land assets (Feng et al., 2021; Jiang and Waley, 2020; Wu, 2023, 2022).

Compared with the original definition posited by Molotch (1976), the role of the government in China's urban growth machine has assumed greater significance due to its monopolistic control over state-owned urban construction land and the administrative authority to forcibly expropriate rural collective land (Qun et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the symbiotic relationship which exists between local governments and developers resonates with the tenets of urban growth machine theory (Zhang, 2014). However, it is important to acknowledge that the growth machine concept does not imply that China's entire party-state-led social governance system is solely predicated on economic growth.

In summary, China's social governance structure is primarily dominated by the central-local party-state bureaucratic system. Demonstrating a substantial degree of historic consistency and pragmatism (Li et al., 2009; Shue, 1988), the system is a critical object for comprehending the broader institutional superstructure of the NED approach, compared to the shifting ideological and political slogans of rural development. This unique blend of centralised personnel and fiscal control and decentralised social administration ensures the efficient integration of local governments while granting them a degree of autonomy with regard to localised development. Moreover, the party-state system has led to a system of upward accountability in which officials are solely answerable to their superiors, relegating society to a peripheral role within the state-society relationship. As a consequence, this institutional framework not only underpins a hybrid and networked model of development but also establishes a scenario where local party-states adopt an intrusive role in the governance of civil society. In this role, they actively interfere in social governance practices, often with the aim of securing immediate political gains. Furthermore, the existent local governance and development dynamic underpins an urban growth machine that is focused on boosting urban-industrial growth, urban expansion, and land development for short-term revenue (Wu, 2018), which further reinforces the marginalisation of rural areas, especially more peripheral ones.

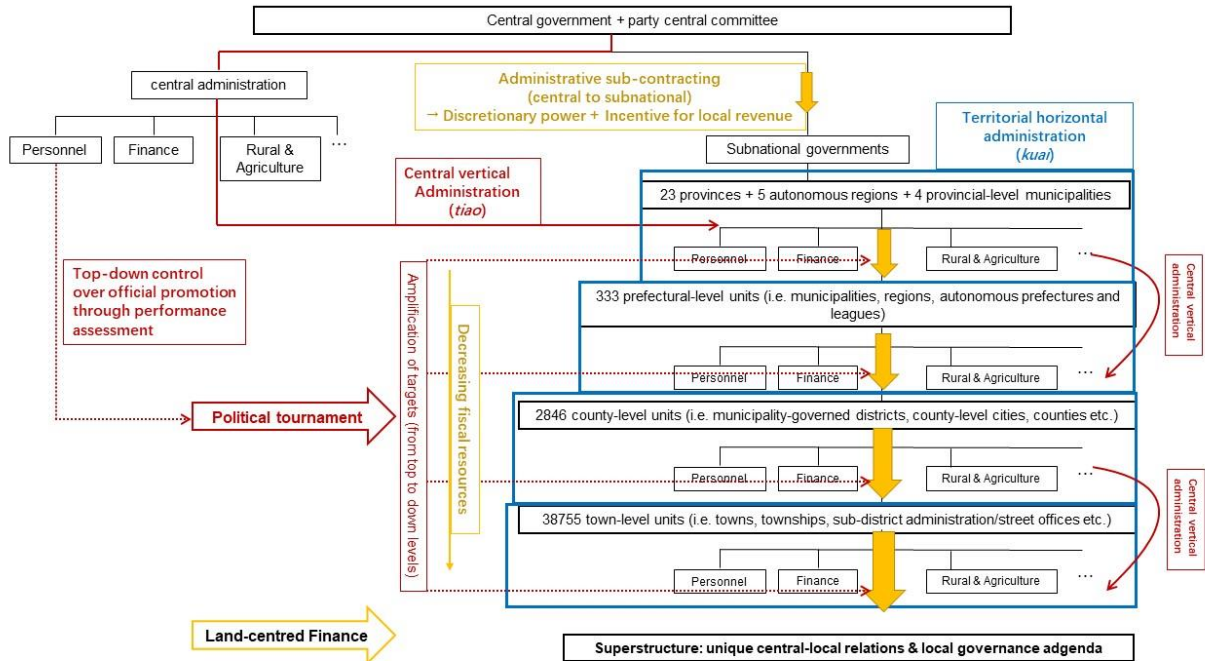


Figure 3.3 The logic of Chinese bureaucracy and local governance framework (Source: Author's own).

### 3.2 Institutionalised urban-rural dualism and structural scarcity of local resources in rural China

This section examine how China's social governance structure has affected rural development, by identifying the institutionalised urban-rural divide and concomitant rural governance issues that have fostered rural marginalisation in China.

The main challenge confronting Chinese rural development lies in the country's urban-rural dual structure, which is characterized by disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of socioeconomic welfare and governance capacity (Zhong, 2011). Rural areas often face obstacles related to their limited access to essential public services as well as lower income levels (Sicular et al., 2007). Theories of exogenous development and development economics, including Lewis's (1954) urban-rural dualism theory, may perceive urban-rural disparities as part of the temporary transition from a traditional agricultural economy to a modern industrial economy.

However, many studies have highlighted that these urban-rural disparities primarily originate from socio-institutional arrangements, and that they lead structural scarcity in terms of administrative, financial, and land-use resources for endogenous rural development (Adams and Gaetano, 2010; Li and Yang, 2013):

With regards to administrative resources, the hierarchical administrative subcontracting system has led to a shortage of resources for local development at the town level. Town-level governments, which function as grassroots bureaucracies and fiscal units, face numerous challenges. Since the 1980s, and in order to promote urbanisation, the development rights of towns and villages in the manufacturing sector have been constrained, and the allocation of land for industrial development has been concentrated in urban centres of higher-level administrative units, including prefectures and counties (Chen and Zhang, 2006; Xiong, 2019). Concurrently, following the collapse of the Maoist commune system and state withdrawal in the 1980s, village committees were established in each village as elected autonomous authorities (discussed further in Chapter Four). However, these committees predominantly function as self-funded informal administrative units and possess very little formal administrative power whilst receiving little political support from the party-state (Hu, 2001; Oi and Rozelle, 2000; Wang, 2014;).

It is also the case that rural town and village authorities face urban-biased financial institutions, and face a worsened financial situation since the central government abolished the agricultural tax in 2006 (Chen, 2014; Kennedy, 2007). This agricultural tax not only generated public revenue from the agricultural sector, but also served as a plausible means for local governments to collect extra fees and charges to support essential public services, including infrastructure construction and the everyday operations of village committees (Ma and Pang, 2010). However, after its introduction, the tax evolved into a means by which grassroots officials could arbitrarily extort rural households, a scenario which sparked rural social unrest in the late 1990s, and ultimately resulting in the tax being abolished (Wen, 2009).

While the agricultural tax reform relieved the tax burden on individual rural households, it greatly weakened the capacity of the grassroots state to deliver public services, as the

government lost its legal authority to collect funds from rural households. In response to this, the central government introduced a transfer payment of 60 billion yuan, but the Ministry of Finance (MoF) estimated that the funding gap for comprehensive rural public services exceeded 180 billion yuan annually (Ma and Pang, 2010). Meanwhile, according to Li et al., (2019), the allocation of payments to the grassroots state was often reduced by the unauthorised retention or misappropriation of financial resources by higher-level governments. Between 1997 and 2005, county- and town-level governments, which accounted for 35.1% of total public expenditure, received only 18.2% of fiscal revenue, indicating a serious deficit issue (Li, 2006).

Facing a shortage of public finance, rural areas can hardly provide equitable provision of public goods, which has exacerbated existent disparities in levels of public service provision between urban and rural areas (Yang and Zhu, 2018). At the same time, the well-known *Hukou* system has limited the access of rural residents to urban collective services, such as education, housing, and healthcare. This unequal distribution of welfare is driven, in part, by the goal of maximising local fiscal revenues (Chan and Selden, 2014).

Despite the abundance of land resources in rural areas, authority to exploit these resources lies predominantly with higher-level governments. Since introducing the “Increasing vs. Decreasing Policy” (增减挂钩) (a balancing mechanism of urban and rural construction land quota) in 2006, rural farmland has been subject to formal expropriation by the state. This has been done in order to facilitate urban expansion and capitalize on the differential land rent by converting agricultural land into industrial and residential areas (Zhao and Zhang, 2017). The increasing vs decreasing policy stipulates that local governments can obtain the extra-quota of state-owned construction land for urban development as long as they expropriate and convert rural construction land (e.g., rural homestead, rural factories etc.) into farmland (Long et al., 2012). While rural households are compensated (individually) with money or (collectively) with new apartment settlements, the compensation is often much lower than the land releasing fees collected by the government (Hui et al., 2013; Long et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2019). Under the policy, rural homesteads are consolidated and reclaimed by local governments for farmland in exchange for construction land quotas which enable expansion of urban areas (Liu et al.,

2014; Wang et al., 2015). Although this resettlement resembles the exogenous rural modernisation approaches adopted in the USSR, it has been primarily motivated by the vested interests of local governments, rather than the well-being of rural households.

There is of course a parallel here with the resurgence of private rentierism in the West – a greater reliance on private land rents in Western market economies, extracted through financial channels, ('taking, not making' according to Mazzucato (2018) finds its equivalent in China's state land rents). Both are considered to be lower risks than business investment and seek to siphon off economic value via the control of land. For China, urban sprawl and involuntary rural land acquisition have frequently been outcomes of China's rapid state-led urbanisation process (Li et al., 2018; Ren, 2017; Tian et al., 2017).

As a consequence of this dualist institutionalism in administrative, fiscal, and land-related power between urban and rural bureaucratic authorities, rural China has faced serious depopulation and rapid population ageing. According to Li and Wang (2020), 79% of villages have become 'hollowed-out' communities. Members of formerly rural households have become migrant workers in urban areas; typically engaged in low-paid informal or precarious employment with limited access to welfare. The hollowed-out villages are mainly concentrated mainly in the (less developed) central and western regions of China (Li and Wang, 2020).

A notable example which shows the multi-dimensional socio-institutional constraints facing Chinese rural development is the town-and-village-owned enterprises (TVEs); locally managed, collectively owned businesses in rural areas that played a crucial role in China's 1980s Open Reform and rural industrialisation. From the 1980s to 1994, town governments were permitted to retain fiscal revenue surpluses after transferring adequate funds to upper-level government. Consequently, town officials actively utilised their administrative power, financial resources, and social networks to foster the growth of TVEs. The rural manufacturing factories and workshops established through a pro-growth coalition of town officials and village elites served as both social enterprises which

provided local employment opportunities and dividend income for rural households, and as significant off-budget financial resources for grassroots authorities.

This phenomenon, often referred to as “local-state corporatism” (Oi, 1992, p.100), exemplifies the reaching-in role of state actors in rural development, which stems from the financial constraints imposed by the administrative subcontracting system. A study by Chen (1995, quoted in Wen, 2012) found that 37.3% of the raw materials of TVEs came from local governments, and that 20.5% of their loans were guaranteed by governments. Local officials also helped TVEs manipulate their accounting to avoid tax collection by upper-level governments (Liu, 2003). By 1993, TVEs accounted for over 44.4% of total national industrial output, surpassing the urban industrial sector dominated by state-owned enterprises (Li, 2005). TVEs also employed nearly a third (27.9%) of the rural labour force; equivalent to about one-fifth of the national labour force in the same year (Lin, 1996).

However, this bottom-up development was abruptly halted as the TVEs seized control of the market previously dominated by state-owned enterprises; a critical instrument of the central party-state in its reaching-in interventions in the national economy (Wen, 2009). This threatened CPC’s urban-oriented welfare regime (Zweig, 2016). Meanwhile, the indiscriminate allocation of financial resources and bank loans by the town governments to TVEs resulted in a severe local debt problem (Wen, 2021). Additionally, another contributing factor to the wane of TVEs was the aforementioned emergence of land finance as the primary financial approach for local governments following the implementation of the 1994 Tax-sharing Fiscal Reform, initiated by the central government (She, 2014; Wu, 2015) (see Section 2.1). This reform resulted in town governments losing their authority to intervene in local banks and significantly diminished their discretionary power with regards to financial budgeting.

From the rapid growth and subsequent decline of TVEs, it is evident that, in addition to the inevitable impacts of urbanisation, their rise and fall also reveal the marginalised status and vulnerability of China's rural areas within the social governance framework. As central policies fluctuate, the party-state government and its controlled public sectors can

either be a facilitating hand in rural development or abruptly transform into a force that stifles it. In fact, the myriad factors constraining rural development, which Xi Jinping's NRRS should address, largely stem from the institutional legacies accumulated through persistent government interventions. Beyond the impact of the party-state-led social governance framework on rural areas, the Chinese government has also directly restructured rural society multiple times, creating unique governance structures. The historical legacies of these interventions will be further elaborated in the Chapter Four.

In general, this chapter analysed how the current party-state-led social governance structure, which is marked by the administrative subcontracting system and political tournaments, led to rural marginalisation in China (Figure 3.4). The examination of the superstructure of rural governance offers valuable insights into the behavioural patterns of both the central and local party states in China. It sheds light on the distinctive urban-rural dualist governance framework that underlies the challenge of rural marginalisation within the country, thereby underscoring the justification for refraining from directly applying Western theories (see Chapter Two) to Chinese practices.

Within the party-state-led social governance framework, peripheral rural societies that are distant from central authority must balance their socio-economic development with the imperatives of central government stability. Should rural growth challenge the financial and social control exercised by central government over rural communities and rural authorities, then the central government is likely to recalibrate its governance through institutional constraints, even if it negatively impacts socio-economic development. The rise and fall of TVEs serves as a salient example of this dynamic. Rural areas thus face political-economic challenges in offering adequate public services (Verdini and Xin, 2024). This shortfall has contributed to the depopulation and socio-economic decline in rural areas of China. This reiterates the argument posited in the conclusion of Chapter Two. This historical logic is elucidated in the historical review of Chapter Four.



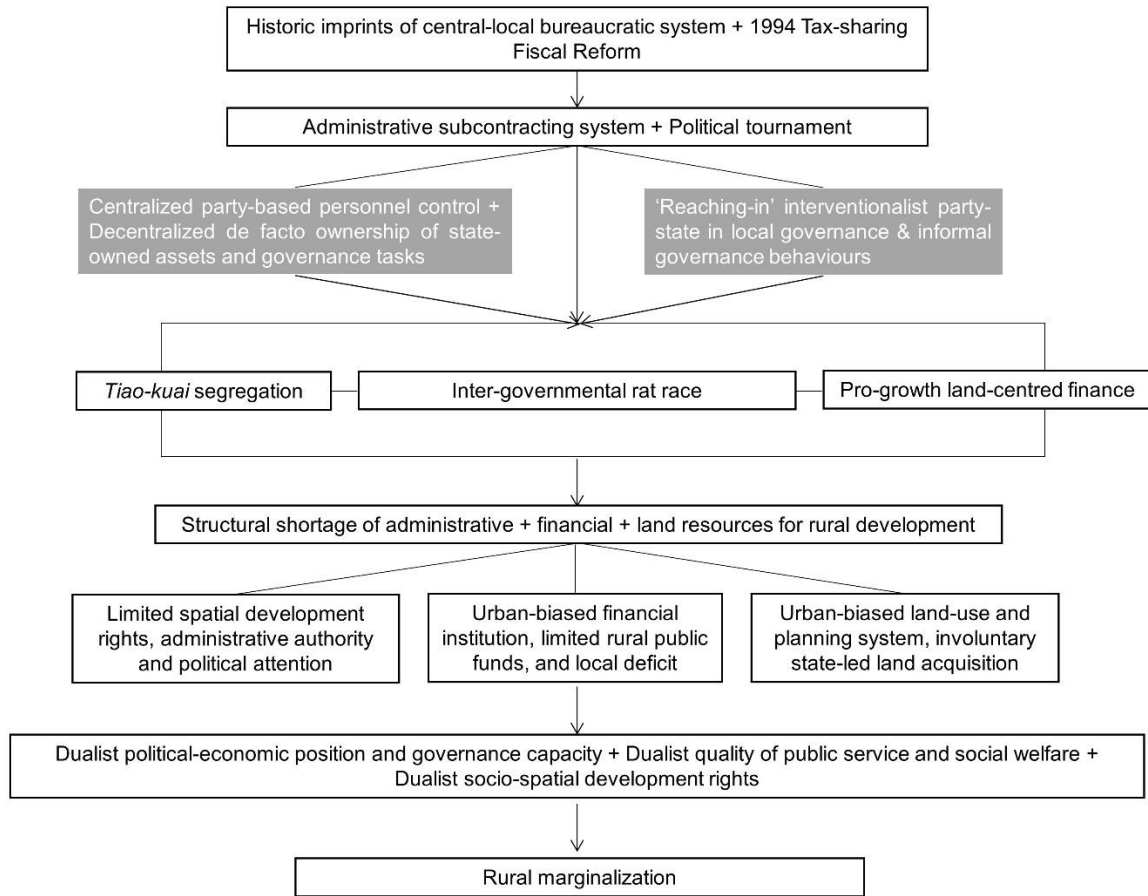


Figure 3.4 The urban-rural dualist social governance structure that causes Chinese rural marginalisation (Source: Author's own)

## **Chapter Four: Rural Integration and China's Rural Development and Governance. Legacies and Evolutions**

This chapter reviews the history of rural governance and development in China. The thesis argues that Chinese rural development is part of the historical objective of the central authority for national integration rather than prioritising the mere socio-economic progress of rural regions. Sections 4.1 to 4.3 review the legacies of four periods in China's rural governance, including the imperial age (221BC to the 1850s), the Maoist age (from 1949 to the 1980s), the early Open Reform period (the 1980s and 1990s), and the “New Socialist Countryside Construction” programme (NSCC, 2005-2012). Through this analysis, the chapter addresses the sub-research question: What are the key characteristics of Chinese rural development history, and what governance legacies and challenges did they bequeath to the Xi administration?

### **4.1 Rural governance in the Imperial Age: Gentry and the *Xiang-Li* institution**

China's rural governance, like its bureaucratic structure, has exhibited strong historical continuity, persisting even after the establishment of the communist regime. For over two millennia, China has pursued rural integration and maintained a powerful bureaucratic system. However, due to technological limitations and high institutional costs, the integration of geographically isolated and remote rural communities has not been fully achieved (Qin, 2003). This phenomenon has been paraphrased as “imperial power stopped at counties” (皇权不下县) (Wen, 1999, p.81), which refers to the incomplete formalisation and centralisation of rural governance by state bureaucratic force (Huang, 2019).

In rural society during the imperial age, the state maintained its authority through intermediary groups rather than formal bureaucratic systems. Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005), a renowned Chinese social anthropologist, argued that a dual-track governance model existed in traditional rural China, and was comprised of a state bureaucracy system allied with rural gentry groups (Fei, 1945). These gentry groups were composed of landlords, local patriarchs, scholars, and/or retired officials (Lieberthal, 2004). In his model, the state

bureaucracy system attempted to exert its influence and control in rural areas, while local gentry groups governed rural communities, and acting as a buffer to alleviate the oppressive and exploitative policies of the imperial regime (Fei, 1945). Concurrently, the gentry and the state also cooperated in many administrative affairs such as tax collection and conscription, and with regard to providing public services such as disaster relief and education (Fairbank, 1983; Wang et al., 2015). Drawing on the gentries' local knowledge and strong relationships with rural households, the state was able to govern rural society indirectly at a low cost. During the mid to late Ming Dynasty (AD1368-1644), the gentry played a leading role in making local laws and regulations (Tang et al., 2011). The rural governance of imperial China was thus marked by a patron-client relationship between the gentry and rural households.

Gentry domination was largely based on their local knowledge and strong bonding relationships, which allowed them – as required by Confucianism - to rule by ethics, (Fei et al., 1992). In traditional rural society, which was rooted in a mix of consanguinity and regionalism, family or kinship-based social units comprised villages that were connected by networks of relatives and regional ties. This led to a typical *guan xi* (relational) network in which rural households were extended from the inner circle of a family to other villagers, and forming a seminal “differential model of association” (差序格局), according to Fei et al. (1992, p.19).

Although the gentry played a significant role in rural governance, it would be wrong to link Chinese rural society to the Western concept of civil society (Edwards, 2013), in which “all forms of social action [were] carried out by individuals or groups who [were] neither connected to, nor managed by, the State” (Cooper, 2018, p.4). In ancient China, the rural was not an autonomous society led by local gentry; rather, during times when the state apparatus functioned normally, each long-lasting dynasty was able to exert its influence on rural governance. Fei's (1945) emphasis on the dominant role of local gentry in village governance may be attributed to the timing of his fieldwork, conducted during the Republic of China (1912-1949), a period marked by significant destabilisation of the imperial regime due to colonialism.

During the imperial era, the state's control over rural areas, serving as a means to stabilise the regime, was primarily through the *xiang-li* (乡里制度). This institutional arrangement divided rural areas into three administrative levels: *xiang* (乡 ≈ township level), *li* (里 ≈ village/community level), and *lin* (邻 ≈ neighbourhood) (Lu, 2018). *Xiang*, which included several villages, was the largest administrative unit below the county level and also the census unit for *hukou*, tax, and military service. *Li* was the action unit of tax collection and conscription, and *lin*, often comprising five households, was the most basic security and surveillance unit to maintain social order (Lu, 2018).

While *xiang-li* was neither a formal governmental authority, nor funded by the state, the work of *xiang-li* staff was similar to formal bureaucrats (Qin, 2003). In this system, after the Song Dynasty (AD960-1279), some local rural residents were mandated by county governments to take up these roles, embedding the responsibilities within the community structure (Qin, 2003). During the middle period of the Qing Dynasty (AD1644–1912), the very last empire, *xiang-li* took on all local administrative affairs, including tax collection, the delivery of all government tasks, local law enforcement, judicial affairs, *hukou* registration, public security, and social care (Tang et al., 2011). Through this system, the state ensured basic state capacity when governing rural areas at a low institutional cost.

The autonomy of rural communities was significantly curtailed with the gentry serving as both leaders of rural communities and, to some extent, state agents; thereby distinguishing them from European feudal lords. By analysing the gentry's source of power, it can be observed that a majority of them successfully completed the *ke ju* (科举), a national written examination that determined the selection of governmental officials based on merit during the imperial era (Elman, 1991). It follows, that the legitimacy of gentry dominance was not only derived from the ethical principles of Confucianism and local social bonds but also conferred by the state. Analogous to the ancient period, within Xi's NRRS, the legitimacy of community governance actions continues has been increasingly depend, both formally and informally, on external authorisation from the state.

However, the gentry, in contrast to the formal state apparatus, did not share the same vision as the imperial regime and were not involved in its administration. They exploited

the power vacuum created by the imperial regime in rural governance and engaged in power speculation, often at the expense of rural households (Hsiao, 1960). This led to a rise in the number of landlords at the end of many dynasties, when state power was undermined by succession uncertainties (Lu, 2019). As a result, in the period of imperial China, the state regime failed to fully integrate rural society, as the gentry buffer acted not only as an intermediary bridge but also as a mechanism that isolated the state and rural communities from each other (Xu, 2019).

Regardless of whether they were part of the gentry domination or the *xiang-li* institution, rural households were clientelist to intermediary groups that controlled a majority of rural resources. This clientelism was not solely based on socio-economic interest but was also deeply embedded in the Confucianist paternalistic governance model. Huang (2008, p.21) terms this governance model, which involved active interaction between the formal state apparatus and informal Janus-faced rural intermediary actors, as “centralised minimalism”.<sup>4</sup> He contends that this model challenges the dualist and arguably oppositional state-society models embedded in many Western governance theories, as the state and society were indirectly linked through intermediary actors.

In summary, over the course of more than two millennia of imperial history, the central authority of China was unable to fully formalise rural governance and complete the integration of rural society into the imperial state apparatus. As a compromise, rural governance in China was characterised by a combination of low-cost extractive central intervention and gentry domination, which has left lasting historical and cultural imprints. These imprints have played a significant role in shaping the clientelist features of today’s Chinese rural governance.

---

<sup>4</sup> The term “centralized minimalism” is attributed to the scholar Philip C. C. Huang, who uses it to describe a distinct form of governance in traditional Chinese society. In this model, the state exercises a minimalist role in daily governance at the local level but retains a centralised authority. Essentially, the central government exercises minimal interference in local affairs, and often delegated power or authority to intermediary groups such as the gentry or clans so that they could maintain order and manage disputes. For more information, see (Huang, 2008)

## **4.2 Rural governance in the Maoist age: village cadres, the grassroots party system, and communes**

From the 1940s onwards, the communist regime embarked on a systematic and forceful process of rural integration in China, with the objectives of reunifying the nation which had been fragmented due to colonisation and wars, and promoting industrialisation under state control. The power of the local gentry was gradually dismantled through this effective but aggressive process.

Around 1953, and as a result of government impetus, the pace of urban-industrial development accelerated. However, the agrarian production system of the time which was anchored in a traditional smallholder economy, could not meet the rapidly expanding food demands of the burgeoning urban population (Wen, 2022). Furthermore, phenomena such as grain hoarding and price inflation began to emerge. To support modernisation and industrialisation, the central party-state initiated the Rural Collectivisation Movement (1953-1978) whereby rural areas were re-integrated into the party-state apparatus through proliferating rural party organisations (Nolan, 1976). The movement began with the promotion of rural cooperatives, which gradually shifted to people's communes (人民公社) in 1958. The communes not only served as a form of agricultural economic organisation but also functioned as town-level governments (Wen, 2009). Similar to the *xiang-li* system, rural households were organised into three levels of units: communes, production brigades (生产大队) and production teams (生产队). Within this three-level system, ownership of all individual land, assets, and agricultural outputs was pooled and redistributed at the brigade level in an effort to promote egalitarian outcomes.

To promote this aggressive reform of property rights, the state expanded rural party organisations. Between 1955 and 1956, the number of members of the CPC rose by approximately 3 million, with the majority of new members being recruited from rural areas (Schurmann, 1968, as quoted by Nolan, 1976). By the mid-1950s, approximately 65 to 70% of CPC members in China were rural householders who were primarily engaged in agricultural production activities, and by 1956, one rural party member was typically

responsible for between 70 and 80 villagers (Nolan, 1976). In contrast, the collectivization movement in the Soviet Union encountered significant opposition, with one party member being responsible for over 400 villagers. These Chinese rural cadres, similar to the gentry, had consanguineous or regionalist advantages over formal officials, which enabled them to effectively facilitate policy implementation.

The quasi-military rural governance structure and communist property reform enhanced despotic and infrastructural power to an unprecedented degree and allowed the government to advance its integration of rural society to a high peak. While the collectivisation movement was presented as a means by which to achieve rural modernisation, it did not constitute an exogenous developmental paradigm with the explicit aim of fostering economic growth within rural society. Rather, its main intention was to facilitate the accumulation of resources for urban industrialisation (Wen, 2021).

Consequently, this approach represents a profoundly extractive governance framework for rural development and governance (Table 4.1). According to a report from the State Council in 1986, the total industrial accumulation by 'scissor price'<sup>5</sup> during the period 1953–1978 ranged from 600 to 800 billion yuan, and constituted between 67 and 89% of China's total industrial assets (Wen, 2009). It was estimated that half of rural households' working time was for no pay (Yu, 2007). However, the 1959-1961 Chinese Famine also revealed the socio-economic unsustainability of this highly centralised and extractive rural governance framework.

---

<sup>5</sup> The term 'scissor price' refers to a phenomenon in China in which there is a significant price disparity between industrial and agricultural products. This disparity often results in industrial products being priced higher than agricultural products.

Table 4.1 Methods of Rural Value Capture During the Collectivisation Period (Source: author's own)

Method	Content
<b>Industry-agriculture scissor price</b>	Ensured the low price of agricultural products and the high price of industrial products through state interventions in pricing (Wen, 2009)
<b>Enforced rural industrialisation</b>	Forced communes to promote large-scale farming and to purchase agricultural machines and chemical fertilisers to absorb domestic industrial outputs (Tsui and Wong, 2013)
<b>Hukou institution</b>	Divided rural and urban residents into two different Hukou (NPCSC, 1958), which physically constrained rural residents in rural localities and prevented them from accessing urban resources
<b>Limited rural welfare</b>	Replaced the 'pay by work' institution with the egalitarian income institution, while controlling payment levels (Yu, 2007)

Despite the radical communist revolution against the traditional gentry, the village cadres<sup>6</sup> became the new patrons in a sustained model of clientelist rural governance, though this was not the original intent of the state (Oi, 1985). As Xu (2019) argues, village cadres are both state agents and local community leaders. Using the clientelist model, which sees power as being “routinely exercised through the allocation of opportunities, goods, and various other resources over which the elite have monopolistic control and on which the non-elite are dependent” (Oi, 1985, p. 240), Oi found that the cadres monopolised access to means of production and subsistence. These village cadres obtained the power to allocate daily tasks, and land plots, as well as the collective means of production, opportunities for side-line work, and social welfare or relief.

Similar to the mechanism of gentry buffers, the cadres had motive to cooperate with rural households to alleviate some of the unconscionable governmental mandates that arose as a consequence of irrational political tournaments (Zhang, 2008). However, unlike traditional society, the rural households were guaranteed basic social security by the state

<sup>6</sup> Village cadres refers to individuals who are usually party members appointed by higher-level authorities to govern and manage local affairs within their respective villages.



agencies; a new element of Maoist rural integration (Xu, 2019). Thus, clientelist relationships were not essential for subsistence, which reduced the personal dependency of rural households on the cadres. Concurrently, in principle, the cadres were under bureaucratic supervision and were also constrained by state and party regulations, and therefore needed therefore to maintain social stability and daily production activities; preventing any return to the despotic rule of the past (Oi, 1989; 1985).

In summary, during the period of Maoist collectivisation, the central state of China achieved a peak point in terms of rural integration through strong grassroots party organisation and a rather coercive quasi-military commune system. However, the socio-economic goal of collectivisation, cloaked in a slogan of rural modernisation, was designed to serve urban-industrial accumulation. Village cadres became the new patrons, and the clientelist pattern of governance was not fundamentally altered. Whilst the state roughly guaranteed the basic social security of rural households it also, and predominantly, continued to exert its traditional role of exerting control and appropriation in rural areas.

#### **4.3 Rural governance in the early Open Reform: village cadres, village committees, and state withdrawal**

In late 1970s, the central government faced serious fiscal crisis (Wen, 2022). Hence, after the well-known 1978 Open Reform, Deng Xiaoping substituted the Maoist commune system with the Household Contract Responsibility System.<sup>7</sup> The reform of property rights essentially reinstated the Confucianist smallholder rural economy, which was characterized by an egalitarian distribution of land among rural households, along with the regular collection of agricultural taxes by the state (Wen, 2009). Under this arrangement, households were entitled to keep the net production value of them after fulfilling their tax obligations.

---

<sup>7</sup> This system shifted the collective farming model to a more decentralized and individualized approach, and provided incentives for increased agricultural productivity and efficiency. Under this new system, agricultural land was allocated to individual households, allowing them to take responsibility for the cultivation and management of the land.

This retrogressive reform of property rights and economic production methods also led to state withdrawal from rural governance; a process that was accelerated by the fiscal crisis in the 1980s (He, 2012; Wang, 2001). This state withdrawal was characterised by a top-down autonomous reform of rural areas, wherein elected village committees were established in each village as self-governing community organisations. However, the reform maintained the urban-rural dualistic land property system, and thus impeded the trading of rural land in the urban market. Consequently, the *de jure* ownership of rural land remained collectively owned by the entire village, with the village committee assuming the role of *de jure* manager for all collective assets and revenues. The subsequent *1987 Organic Law of Village Committees* further reinforced this degree of rural autonomy, and clarified that village committees were not bureaucratic branches of town-level governments but autonomous authorities elected by villagers. According to the law, village cadres were to serve part-time and remain connected to rural production and embedded in rural life (Wang, 2014). However, in practice, self-governance was promoted to offload the fiscal burden of local governments, and rural communities were left with imbalanced responsibilities and uneven fiscal resources, with villages not even being formal fiscal units of government (Oi and Rozelle, 2000).

As noted in Section 3.2, the abolishment of the agricultural tax in the early 2000s undermined the fiscal capacity of grassroots governments to provide public service. Furthermore, this tax reform also weakened the role of village cadres as intermediaries between the party-state and rural society (He, 2019a). The Open Reform has also facilitated the migration of rural residents to urban areas in search of employment opportunities, and consequently led to a significant rural depopulation.<sup>8</sup> The state extraction of rural resources has shifted from direct agricultural taxation to indirect urban-rural dualist institutional arrangements, such as inequitable urban-rural social welfare policies, the suppression of grain prices, and the unequal distribution of mainstream resources (i.e., education, healthcare, and infrastructure) between urban and rural regions. As a result, the state no longer requires village cadres to extract rural resources

---

<sup>8</sup> According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), over 220 million rural people worked as migrant workers in urban areas in 2009, 31% of the total rural population. The number reached a new peak of 293 million in 2021.

on its behalf, and as a result rural society no longer relies on them to serve as intermediary buffers (Smith, 2010).

The diminishing role of village cadres and the party-state in rural governance has not only undermined the political authority of the party-state but also resulted in two socio-institutional challenges emerging for Chinese rural development (Wu and Liu, 2021). First, the egalitarian rural land tenure system has resulted in fragmented land ownership, with 90% of farmers being traditional smallholders (NBS, 2019), with an average per capita arable land area of only 0.1 hectares (The World Bank, 2018). Despite the presence of growing urban capital to acquire large-scale rural land for tourism development or mechanized agriculture, the presence of the dualistic urban-rural land market alongside fragmented land ownership has led to elevated transaction costs and impeded the creation of bridging relationships between extra-local actors and communities (Wen, 2021). Consequently, market-driven land consolidation has become increasingly challenging, necessitating the involvement of state authority as an indispensable force in rural development.

Secondly, the diminishing political authority of village cadres has led to a decline in social cohesion and organisation capacity, thereby compromising community capacity to leverage local resources and engage in collaborative efforts with external stakeholders (Su, 2008). State withdrawal has given rise to a resurgence of traditional rural power dynamics, such as consanguineous interest groups, rural entrepreneurs/wealthy groups, and even thugs and gangsters (Chen and Liu, 2021). Although the predominant clientelist governance structure has remained largely intact, the state's capacity to deliver public tasks, collect decision-making data, and guide rural society has weakened (Ong, 2018). Moreover, the coalition between informal rural ruling forces and village cadres, characterized by coercion, has posed challenges to the political authority of the central party-state and consequently undermined social trust and support for the CPC regime in rural regions (Chen, 2015).

In summary, the Open Reform effectively terminated the Maoist quasi-military dominance of the party-state in rural regions. Nevertheless, subsequent state withdrawal resulted in

an institutionalised scarcity of social relational resources within rural communities which has impeded their interactions with external entities. This dearth of resources has also hindered the development of both exogenous and (neo-)endogenous factors.

#### **4.4 Rural governance before the Xi Era: programme-based governance and rural restructuring**

The increasing socioeconomic disparities between urban and rural areas, along with the growing influence of local forces in rural governance, not only posed challenges to the political authority of the central party-state in rural regions but also destabilized Chinese society (Wen, 2010). Between 1985 and 2005, the urban-to-rural household income ratio in China widened from 1.65 to 2.45 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The reestablishment of central party-state influence in rural governance began during Hu Jintao's administration (2002-2012). Since 2003, the annual “No.1 Circular of the CPC Central Committee” has refocused on rural matters. In 2005, the central state introduced the “11<sup>th</sup> National Five-Year Plan (2006-2010)”, which emphasised the NSCC policy. This policy allocated substantial state funds to improve rural physical infrastructure, basic social security and public services (e.g., schools, medical insurance, pension etc.), and reduce the disparities between urban and rural areas. Between 2003 and 2012, the funds from central government for rural development rose from 214.4 billion to 1.23 trillion yuan, 19.2% of total annual central fiscal expenditure (MoF, 2012). Additionally, the urban-rural household income ratio decreased from 2.45:1 in 2005 to 2.12:1 in 2013 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The NSCC introduced a new rural governance structure, known as ‘programme-based governance’ (PBG), which was tailored to the current Chinese system of bureaucracy (see Section 3.1) (Qu, 2012). The operational mechanism of the PBG framework involves several steps (Shen, 2020; Zhe and Chen, 2011). At first, central- or provincial-level government initiates a rural development programme, such as Modern Agriculture Zones, Characteristic Towns, and Beautiful Countryside. These programmes are then ‘contracted’ (发包) to the lower-tier governments through administrative top-down allocation or bidding. The programme carries central earmarked funds and political

incentives (e.g., civil servant headcounts, high-level honour, promotion etc.), which seek to motivate local states to invest matching funds in order to compete for the programme's fund or facilitate the implementation of the programme. Next, local governments (typically prefectural or county governments) 'consolidate' (打包) different programme to integrate the funds to realise the political ambitions and development visions of local leaders. At this stage, towns and villages 'compete' (抓包) for public funds to address the financial shortfall caused by the highly-centralised governance system (for details, please see Section 3.2). Here, the state has turned from a 'grabbing hand' to a 'helping hand' for rural areas.

The PBG framework has effectively repositioned central governmental authorities into a leadership role when it comes to rural governance affairs and has also resulted in the re-integration of rural development into party-state apparatus. Zhou and Chen (2011) estimated that 28 central authorities released over 94 programmes during the NSCC. The work of village cadres as the key intermediary group also shifted from its past focus on mitigating state extraction and ensuring the survival of local residents, to its current focus on competing for and implementing state programmes (He, 2017). As a result, increasing formalism, bureaucratism, and red tape has been observed in rural governance (He, 2019a; Huang, 2021).

This new reaching-in governance framework has increased the reliance of day-to-day rural governance on public investment and political endorsement. However, it has failed to challenge clientelist governance. Consequently, the participation and visions of rural communities in rural development have remained marginalized (Wen, 2010). Moreover, the implementation of the PBG framework has not addressed the chaotic practice of rural governance. The proliferation of public programmes and their accompanying local investment requirements have given rise to various governance challenges, including village debts (Zhou, 2012), rent-seeking behaviour among village cadres (Huang et al., 2014), and social exclusion and deprivation (Ye and Li, 2014). Huang et al., (2014) have criticised many domestic studies on the PBG — which often praise this institutional structure and imply opportunities for a government to governance transition — as merely the rationalisation and legitimation of state interventions by academic cheerleaders.

At the same time, exogenous state investment through the PBG framework has significantly enhanced rural physical amenities and socio-economic conditions, thereby stimulating rural restructuring in China. This rural restructuring has been marked by the increasing number of private actors in the rural economy. For instance, the agricultural sector which was previously dominated by smallholders, is now supported by private capital which accounted for 80% of investment (Economic Daily, 2020). Additionally, about 7.8 million people, including rural migrant workers, technicians, and university students, have migrated or returned to rural areas, with 31 million people from the creative class, such as entrepreneurs or professionals working in internet-based rural businesses (MARA, 2019).

This reverse migration has resulted in the proliferation of Taobao villages and idyllic-life vloggers such as Li Ziqi (Luo and Qian, 2021). Increasing amenity migration driven by members of a nostalgic urban bourgeoisie has also emerged in the rural localities of economically-advanced regions such as the Yangtze River Delta (Zhong and Xin, 2020). The socio-demographic profile and economic structure of rural China have thus been pluralised and differentiated (Zhu and Guo, 2022). However, as emphasised by Wen (2022), diminished rural community leadership and the absence of a supportive institutional framework for rural collective economies founded on uncertain land property rights, have impeded villagers from effectively harnessing the benefits derived from the process of rural restructuring.

Despite the prevalence of reverse migration, rural-to-urban migration has remained as the predominant trend, as local governance and development agendas continue to prioritise urban expansion. During the NSCC (2005 to 2012), China's level of urbanisation (i.e., the percentage of urban residents as a proportion of the country's total population) increased significantly from 43% to 53%, and was accompanied by a substantial expansion in the area of urban construction land from 29,637 km<sup>2</sup> to 45,750 km<sup>2</sup>; indicating rapid urban growth (MoHURD, 2013). In contrast, the rural population witnessed a decline from 745 million to 637 million during the same period (NBS, 2022).

While the NSCC emphasised the preservation of farmland and the territorial development of rural areas, various studies have identified a persistent concentration of a majority of financial and administrative resources within the urban growth machine, which was primarily driven by the real estate market and land revenue (Long et al., 2010; Wen, 2010). Consequently, extensive rural development projects, including farmland consolidation and the construction of new villages, exploited rural land resources through urban pro-growth coalitions between local governments and developers (Chuang, 2014; Sargeson, 2013).

Furthermore, state withdrawal from rural governance during the early period of Open Reform led to corrupt and weak village-level party organisations. This weakening was compounded by a rural governance structure that was rife with strongman politics, gangsters and factionalism, and plutocratic rule (He, 2021). These conditions undermined the rural self-governance system that had been in place since the 1980s, and posed a threat to both the authority of the party-state power in rural areas and the fundamental stability of rural society (Yao, 2017).

Although this chaotic governance landscape resulted in some improvements, there was no fundamental change. The allocation and investment of state programme funds presented considerable challenges in numerous villages, and culminated in the substantial embezzlement of public investments (He, 2014). This not only undermined the efficacy of rural development initiatives but also eroded the credibility of governmental oversight in these contexts, leaving central government's capacity for rural integration limited.

In general, this chapter provided an overview of China's rural governance history, and highlighted four main periods and their enduring legacies; these constitute a significant component of the institutional backdrop for the NED (Table 4.2). Despite the evolving governance agenda, the central theme of the Chinese rural governance framework has been constant over time; rural integration. While certain studies have perceived the central government's off-loading of governance duties during the Open Reform as

indicative of a Western-style neoliberal governance transformation, subsequent state intervention in rural areas along with the establishment of the centralised PBG framework from the NSCC once again echo with the leitmotif of rural integration.

Despite persistent efforts to realise rural integration, the clientelist characteristics of Chinese rural governance and the presence of intermediaries between the state and rural society have not been eradicated. Nevertheless, the transition of the state's role from a grabbing hand to a helping hand in rural development strengthened rural society's dependence on central government for development. Additionally, the NSCC did not bring about fundamental changes to the urban-biased nature of local governance or the development agenda.



Table 4.2 Evolution of rural governance in China (Source: Author's own)

	<b>Key institutional framework</b>	<b>Intermediary group(s)</b>	<b>Degree of integration</b>	<b>Main target of governance</b>	<b>Legacies</b>
<b>Imperial period (BC221-1912)</b>	Gentries + <i>Xiang-Li</i> system	Gentry & Xiang-Li officials: buffer of rural society from imperial state extraction + state agents delivered public tasks and managed rural society	High to low: changed by the strength of imperial power, generally high in flourishing periods and low in declining periods of each dynasty	To guarantee tax collection, military conscription and social stability	1) Clientelist rural governance structure based on intermediary groups; 2) Incomplete national integration of populous rural society
<b>Maoist Collectivisation Period (1953-1978)</b>	Party-based commune system	Village cadres: buffer of rural society from party-state extraction + state agents delivered public tasks	Very high: quasi-military social control + nationalised property institution	To extract rural resources for urban-industrial primitive accumulation	1) Rural party networks; 2) Urban-biased development agenda; 3) Urban-rural dualist governance structure;
<b>Early Open Reform Period (1980s-2000s)</b>	Village committee-based limited autonomy	Village cadres and other informal ruling forces: actors to guarantee basic political and social stability	Low: grassroots state with low capacity and village cadres from unreliable democratic institution	To off-load state financial burden	1) State withdrawal from rural governance; 2) Land finance and urban growth machine; 3) Urban-rural dualist land tenure system; 4) Weakened leadership of grassroots party-state and chaotic rural governance

---

<b>NSCC (2005- 2012)</b>	PBG framework	Village cadres: actors to compete for and coordinate the implementation of state programmes	High: incremental dependence of rural governance and development of top-down state programmes	To narrow urban-rural disparities and maintain social stability	1) 'Reaching- in' PBG framework; 2) Rural restructuring and pluralistic rural society; 3) Limited public participation and community capacity.
----------------------------------	------------------	---	--	---	--

---

## **Chapter Five: Conceptualising ‘Neo-exogenous Development’**

While the NSCC improved the living environment and socio-economic conditions of rural China, several socio-institutional issues persist, including a separated urban-rural land market, feeble community leadership, and a lack of community capacity and public engagement in rural development. Since 2013, under the new administration of Xi Jinping, intensive institutional and legislative reforms have been initiated that have sought to explore and promote a new approach to rural development. This rural reform has been marked by the NRRS that was introduced by the central government in 2017. This thesis posits that a new networked development model, which the thesis terms neo-exogenous development (NED), has emerged within this context.

This chapter clarifies the rural policy shifts which have under the Xi administration, and through so doing crystallises the governance context of NED. It is contended that the logics behind these shifts are deeply entrenched in historic imprints. To help readers understand these changes, Chapters Three and Chapter Four analysed two key strands of logics: the ‘party-state logic’ which is rooted in contemporary history (stemming from the CPC party-state social governance system and the ensuing institutionalised urban-rural dualist development) and ‘intermediary integration logic’, which is steeped in ancient history (underscored by the central authority’s aspiration for rural integration and a clientelist governance structure featured by rural intermediaries).

This chapter conceptualises NED, and is comprised of two sections. Section 5.1 delves into the institutional framework of NED, highlighting two features and outcomes of it: active party-state and activated community. Thereafter, Section 5.2 further differentiates the NED from the mainstream international rural development theories discussed in Chapter Two, as well as the indigenous rural development paradigms explored in Chapter Four.

### **5.1 Rural governance in the Xi Era: active party-state and activated communities**

In 2017, the NRRS was introduced by the central government as a follow-up to the NSCC. Rooted in the PBG framework, the NRRS comprises a range of state-sponsored

programmes which has a focus on five key goals for rural modernisation: (1) economic prosperity, (2) sustainability and liveability, (3) cultural civilisation, (4) effective governance, and (5) socio-economic well-being. Beyond the multifaceted aspects of development, the NRRS has shown the resolve of central government to transform institutionally distorted urban-rural relations and ameliorate rural marginalisation (Liu et al., 2020). For the first time, rural development has been officially acknowledged as a national-level strategy, on par with urbanisation, emphasising its equal significance and priority.

Prior to analysing the policy framework of NRRS,<sup>9</sup> which has directly shaped the context of NED practice, it is crucial to identify the socio-economic changes and salient political issues that have emerged during the Xi Era. In recent years, China has faced development pressures which have arisen from both external and internal factors. Externally, the deteriorating geopolitical situation and the global economy have contributed to a decline in net exports and manufacturing industry in China. According to LaRocco (2022), China's share of global exports of consumer goods has fallen since 2016. Internally, the land finance institution driven by local governments (as discussed in Section 3.2) is no longer sustainable due to the sluggish real estate market and excessive local debt burdens (Gyourko, 2022).

In 2020, the central government introduced the “Dual Circulation Strategy” (内外双循环战略) to rebalance China's economic growth by emphasising domestic consumption, reducing reliance on external markets and technology, and maintaining social stability (Cainey and Prange, 2023). Given that rural areas in China are vast untapped domestic markets, the NRRS is considered to be closely connected with this strategy with regards to economic resilience (Liu et al., 2020). In his seminal address at the Central Rural Work Conference in 2020 — the apex conference on agriculture and rural affairs in China — Xi

---

<sup>9</sup> The NRRS framework thereafter refers to the general rural development framework established by Xi since 2013, rather than the specific policy document initiated by the central government in 2017.

Jinping called for the entire CPC and society to harness its efforts to promote rural revitalisation. As Xi (2020, p.3) highlighted:

Building a new development pattern is our strategic move in response to the world's major changes and a proactive step in adapting to changes in our domestic development stage [...]. Placing the strategic focus on expanding domestic demand, rural areas offer significant potential and can play a pivotal role. With hundreds of millions of farmers moving towards comprehensive modernisation at the same time, it can unleash a massive demand for consumption and investment. The economic circuit between urban and rural areas is essential to the Domestic Circulation, and it is also a crucial factor in ensuring a healthy balance between domestic and international circulation.

NRRS should not be simply regarded as a policy that is either solely dedicated to the socioeconomic advancement of rural areas or to compensating for the deprivation caused by the urban-rural dualist institutionalism of the past few decades. Instead, this thesis contends that NRRS is a continuation of the NSCC and is still driven by the pragmatic need to maintain socio-political stability. In fact, Xi has clearly articulated the significance of rural stability and well-being for regime stability, national unity, and in addressing the increasingly intense political and economic frictions between the Chinese government and Western societies:

Across diverse historical dynasties, a robust agricultural sector and a stable peasantry have invariably heralded national unity and societal tranquillity. Conversely, a languishing agricultural sector and restive peasantry have precipitated national fragmentation and societal tumult, (Xi, 2020: p.1).

In view of the global changes not seen in a century, stabilising the agricultural sector and securing the foundations of 'agriculture, rural areas, and farmers' serve as a 'ballast stone' in responding to the changes and forging new pathways. For a large nation like ours with a population of 1.4 billion, the well-being of 'agriculture, rural areas, and farmers' is pivotal to the overall initiative. Currently, the international environment is increasingly complex, and the instability and uncertainty are growing daily. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is widespread and profound, economic globalisation is encountering a backlash, and the world is entering a period of turbulence and transformation. In response, we must have a clear understanding and prepare for a protracted endeavour, (Xi, 2020: p.2).

Xi then specifically reflected on the value of rural revitalisation to enhancing the domestic economic resilience and stability of rural society:

A cardinal objective (of NRRS) is to unerringly anchor our efforts in domestic agricultural production, leveraging the certitude of internal supply to counterbalance the vagaries of external (international political-economic) environment [...] In navigating extant and emergent challenges, the remit extends beyond merely steadying the agricultural sector to ensuring stability of rural society, (Xi, 2020: p.2).

At present, expanding domestic demand, stabilising investment, and promoting infrastructure development should not be limited to urban areas alone. There is still much unfinished business in rural areas, and there is significant room for investment, (Xi, 2020, p.7)

In fact, Xi has even suggested the value of urban-rural dualist institution in maintaining the stability of the entire national economy and urban-rural society:

It's noteworthy that economic perturbations disproportionately reverberate among the rural migrant workers and the societal fabric remained largely undistributed (during the COVID-19 pandemic). A testament to the bedrock is provided by the agrarian roots [...] rural migrant workers have farmland and houses in their villages, so they can always go back to the rural to plant, eat, and work; even if they do not go back (from urban to the rural), this (rural collective land ownership) engendered an intrinsic sense of security, even among those who chose not to return. This is the hallmark of China's urbanisation path, and it represents our manoeuvring space and distinctive advantage in responding to risks and challenges, (Xi, 2020: p.2).

However, as analysed in Section 4.4, the implementation of the NSCC resulted in rural restructuring, and resulted in the growing participation of various non-governmental entities such as private enterprises, returning migrants workers, and ordinary urban citizens in the socio-economic fabric of rural areas. This rural restructuring brought not only socio-economic vitality, but also changes to the land use and property ownerships of rural areas as well as challenges to socio-political stability. As Xi said,

Currently, rural society in China is undergoing profound changes and adjustments [...] Although the situation is complex and intricate, it can be summarised with a single word: 'dispersed' [...] (we should) accelerate the establishment of a party-led rural governance system, (Xi, 2020: p.8).

Xi's statements once again reflect the historical objective of Chinese national integration; transforming the dispersed rural society into a cohesive social collective and integrating the same into social control by the central authority, so as to create highly unified and integrated socio-political entity. In fact, the Xi administration has exhibited a notable

inclination towards deriving its goals for political reform and party-statecraft from ancient Chinese history, rather than perpetuating the initial phase of the Open Reform which favoured Western democracy and market economy (Rudd, 2022; Wang, 2017). Consequently, in terms of rural areas, which have been historically perceived as having tendencies towards dispersion and fragmentation, it is unsurprising that the concepts of integration and unity have garnered increased emphasis in recent rural governance initiatives.

This thesis argues that the advent of the NRRS did not diminish, but rather reinforced, the primacy of national integration as a longstanding determinant of rural governance and development, that can be traced back to the imperial era. In the new context of rural restructuring, this thesis advances that this intention has been manifested by the paradoxical combination of top-down governance structure rooted in the party-state system and the PBG framework, along with an emphasis on community-based development and the active involvement of a broad range of social stakeholders. In this study, the concepts of active party-state and activated community were employed to encapsulate the two categories of policy concerns within the NRRS framework. As indicated by the terms active and activated, the Chinese party-state plays a leading role in this institutional arrangement, while the institutionalisation of diverse participation represents an attempt to integrate the now pluralistic rural society into the party-state system.

### *(1) The Active party-state*

The active party-state refers to a new party-statecraft that was adopted by the central government to navigate urban-rural relations, facilitate rural development, and ensure the effective implementation of NRRS programmes. In essence, the active party-state represents a nationwide political campaign system, driven by CPC party networks at all levels and across various sectors (both public and private), with the objective of promoting rural development. It signifies a socio-power structure that is proactive and assertive, and seeks to exert increased influence and reaching-in control over rural governance.

The active party-state is driven by top-level institutional design. The term “rural revitalisation strategy” was first introduced in Xi Jinping's personal report at the National Congress of the CPC in 2017, which set the principal agenda of the party across all policy sectors. As he said,

“The issues related to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers are fundamental matters that have a significant impact on the country's overall development and the well-being of its people. It is crucial for the entire party to consistently prioritize and address these rural issues as a top priority in its work”, (Xinhua Net, 2017, p.31).

The NRRS has been designated as a key task in the annual “No.1 Circulars of the Central CPC Committee” since 2018. This directive emphasised the significance of rural development and the need to address the longstanding urban-biased development agenda in state policies.

The political directive on rural development has been manifested by the significant changes in institutional and legislative arrangements implemented by the central government to mobilise the entire party-state apparatus of China to promote rural development. In 2018, a departmental reshuffle took place which consolidated the fragmented responsibilities of rural development that had previously been dispersed between multiple central governmental agencies under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) (State Council, 2018a). Additionally, the Executive Office of the Central Leading Group for Rural Work<sup>10</sup> (CLGRW) was relocated to MARA with the aim of bolstering its political authority and effectiveness. In 2021, the establishment of the Rural Revitalization Bureau<sup>11</sup> as a deputy-ministerial-level central governmental administration which exceeded the typical rank of such institutions exemplified the government's commitment to promoting the implementation of the NRRS. Furthermore, the government also established the Ministry of Natural Resources which aims to

---

<sup>10</sup> This office is responsible for assisting and supporting the CLGRW, the highest decision-making authority of China chaired by a vice premier, in formulating central policies related to rural development. It plays a crucial role in coordinating and promoting overall rural development strategies, addressing agricultural and rural issues, and ensuring the implementation of key initiatives and programmes in rural areas.

<sup>11</sup> While this administration was merged into the MARA in 2023, it is still directed by the deputy minister of MARA to ensure the administrative priority of NRRS (MARA, 2023).



integrate the previously separated administrative functions of land quota management and spatial planning. This integration is crucial to prevent the erosion of farmland by urban growth machine (Liu and Zhou, 2021).

Central government has also enacted legislative measures to strengthen the administrative and judicial accountability of officials at all levels within both party and state bureaucratic bodies. These measures have been put in place to ensure the effective implementation of NRRS policies, and to facilitate their smooth execution from the central level down to the community level. In 2021, the central government launched the *Law on Promoting Rural Revitalisation* (《乡村振兴促进法》) (National People's Congress, 2021). This law identifies the legal responsibilities of all levels of party and state agencies when it comes to promoting rural development, and stipulates various supportive measures for rural development, including earmarked public investment, the priority use of local governmental land revenue in rural areas, financing schemes for agri-business, rural insurance service systems, and preferential land-use policies. It also requires all levels of government to incorporate the promotion of rural revitalisation into the Five-year Plan, which guides and coordinates local socio-economic development targets and determines the allocation of funding for programmes in different sectors. Two years later, the central government released the "Implementation Measures for the Rural Revitalisation Responsibility System" (《乡村振兴责任制实施办法》), which aims to integrate strict party management throughout all stages and aspects of rural revitalisation (State Council, 2022). The "Measure" requires all levels of governments to establish specific performance evaluation systems for rural revitalisation, which will monitor the attainment of annual targets and tasks. This system incorporates a range of reward and sanction mechanisms, and thus provides incentives and penalties to ensure adherence to the NRRS programmes.

This stringent accountability system extends beyond the promotion of NRRS and is the manifestation of Xi Jinping's broader social governance strategy, which emphasises the party's role in governing rural areas and the importance of strict intra-party discipline and supervision. For instance, the central government introduced the *Public Servants*

*Administrative Sanctions Law* (《公职人员政务处分法》) (National People's Congress, 2020), which officially included semi-formal village cadres within the category of public servants (though not as formal officials). This inclusion subjected them to supervision and disciplinary measures by the party-state.

In addition to the political mobilisation and legislation, the central government has adopted several zone-based rescaling measures to support rural territorial development. Various zones — such as Modern Agriculture Zones (MAZs), Rural Entrepreneurship Zones, and Rural Revitalisation Demonstrative Zones – have been established in rural areas as state programmes by the central or provincial governments. Securing a zone programme not only entails receiving financial subsidies and political attention from higher-level authorities but also often leads to potential promotion for the key officials responsible for managing the rural areas within the zone. It follows that this enables them to ascend to higher administrative positions (Lim, 2019; Wu, 2016). For instance, if a rural area within a town-level jurisdiction is designated as a provincial or national-level zone, the official in charge of the zone may be promoted from town/section level to deputy-county/division level (for more information of the Chinese administrative ranks, please see the Appendix B). These zone programmes upscale local rural development issues and expand the access of rural communities to institutional resources.

In terms of spatial planning and governance, the central government has also sought to further challenge the urbanisation strategies driven by the urban growth machine, with the aim of preserving rural land resources. In 2018, the central government consolidated those functions related to urban and rural land planning, regulation, and enforcement that were dispersed across multiple central departments, by establishing the Ministry of Natural Resources and promoting reforms in national land and spatial planning. The spatial planning reforms centralised plan-making and supervision through measures such as the imposition of stringent agricultural land preservation redlines and urban growth boundaries (Zhang et al., 2023). Concurrently, and since the advent of the Xi administration, central government has shifted its pro-urbanisation strategy articulated in the “10<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2001-2005)”, which had relaxed the strict control over the scale of large cities initially imposed in the 1980s (State Council, 2001). Recent policy

documents, including the “National New Urbanisation Plan (2014-2020)” (《新型城镇化战略 (2014-2020) 》) and the “Outline of the Strategy for Expanding Domestic Demand (2022-2035)” (《扩大内需战略规划纲要 (2022-2035) 》) propose strict limitations on the population size of large cities with over five million residents. These measures offer structural support for the implementation of the NRRS by reconciling the tensions between urbanisation and rural development.

Despite these institutional reforms, the financial support system that sustains the active party-state continues to rely on the PBG framework (discussed in Section 4.4). However, as stated in a report by the deputy minister of the MARA in 2019, the total expenditure for the NRRS is projected to exceed 7 trillion yuan between 2018 and 2023. In comparison, the financial scale of the NSCC falls short. This study examined the relevant investments made by the central government from 2005 to 2012 and found that total investment amounted to approximately 5 trillion yuan (Xinhua Net, 2012; 2010; People’s Daily, 2012). This significant fund will be financed by transferring a large proportion of land revenue of local governments to the rural areas, and at the provincial level, the proportion is required to be over 50% (State Council, 2020).

In summary, the strengthening of party leadership over state apparatus in these institutional reforms reflects a distinct feature of the overall social governance system under the Xi administration, with the party assuming a comprehensive leadership over everything (Horsley, 2019; Leutert, 2018). This can be seen as the latest endeavour by the party to bolster the political stability of the regime (Guo, 2020). Rural integration unquestionably constitutes a focal point of these political efforts (Graeme, 2018). As some studies have implied, through party-led coordination of state agencies and rural social actors, the Xi administration has sought to address longstanding issues within the existing social governance system such as fragmented governance (Erik, 2018), the inter-governmental ‘rat race’ in economic growth (Kostka and Zhang, 2018), the urban-biased pro-growth development agenda (Wu et al., 2022), and resultant institutionalised urban-rural disparities (these issues were discussed in Section 3.2). In contrast to the Western devolution, the Chinese government has chosen a different path of social governance

reform, which has shifted from state government to party governance. The active party-state that is emerging in rural development should thus be considered to be a part of these broader efforts to establish a new governance mechanism that allows the central party-state to reach in to day-to-day governance.

## *(2) Activated community*

According to Foucault (1977), power operates through mechanisms of discipline and normalisation, and shape individuals' behaviours. In the case of China's rural communities, the active party-state has conducted extensive programmes and implemented party rules and evaluation systems to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to interact with the state. This has, in turn, resulted in the emergence of what this thesis calls activated communities. Against the backdrop of the active party-state, the activated community strives to increase outward connectivity and actively participates in party-building activities that enhance their capacity to engage with the party state's reaching-in initiatives.

The central government's intention to foster activated communities in rural areas is evident through its integration of the top-down PBG framework with active participation and collaboration from social actors in the implementation of NRRS policies. This is reflected in the Action Plan of NRRS (2018-2022) and various policies such as "Collaborative Rural Construction" (共同缔造)<sup>12</sup>, "Design in the Countryside" (设计下乡)<sup>13</sup> and "Urban-to-Rural Migrants Entrepreneurship Action" (返乡入乡创业),<sup>14</sup> which emphasise the involvement of rural households in policy implementation and benefit

---

<sup>12</sup> "Collaborative Rural Construction" (2019) is a state programme that was initiated by the MoHURD, and seeks to encourage the participation of local residents, rural cooperatives, and rural enterprises in the planning, construction, and management of rural infrastructure and services, so as to improve the living standards and well-being of rural communities.

<sup>13</sup> "Design in the Countryside" (2018) is a state programme that was initiated by the MoHURD. It aims to mobilise design and planning professionals in universities and design institutes to provide design service to improve rural living environment.

<sup>14</sup> "Urban-to-Rural Migrants Entrepreneurship Action" (2021) was initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security and MARA, and aimed to encourage rural migrant workers, college graduates and other urban citizens to return to their hometowns or rural areas to start their own businesses and promote rural development so that the socio-economic conditions of rural areas could be improved and the integration of urban and rural areas promoted. The policy provides various forms of support, including financial assistance, training, and preferential policies for land use and business registration.

sharing. Additionally, these NRRS initiatives encourage the participation of diverse extra-local stakeholders such as state-owned and private enterprises and universities in driving rural revitalisation efforts.

In contrast to conventional rural networked development, it is important to highlight that in the pursuit of collaboration, the party-state has taken on a significant role in nurturing and fostering diverse socio-economic actors, securing its leadership in guiding the ongoing rural restructuring process. This is manifested in the *Regulations of the CPC on Rural Work* (《中国共产党农村工作条例》) (CPC Central Committee, 2019), which highlight the importance of cultivating emerging social actors, such as rural entrepreneurs, rural returnees, and local university graduates into party members. For instance, the active party-state has been developing new agri-business operational actors (e.g., rural collectively-owned enterprises, rural cooperatives, leading agricultural enterprises, family farms etc.) throughout the country who will act as accelerators of the rural restructuring process (Schneider, 2017). These new rural actors will be prioritised when it comes to becoming party members and will be recognized as potential candidates for the positions of village party secretaries and cadres, in order to “reinforce the foundation of the party regime” and align the thoughts and actions (of rural party members) with the requirements and directives of the central party committee (CPC Central Committee, 2019, Section Four).

To encourage extra-local participation and investment in rural development, a land institution reform has been initiated since the beginning of the Xi administration to reduce the barriers which separate the urban-rural land market. In 2014, the central government initiated the Land Rights Separation Reform (农村土地“三权分置”改革), in which rural land rights were separated into: ownership rights (所有权) that are collectively shared by the whole village, contract rights (承包权) that naturally belong to each rural household, and management rights (经营权) that rural household can rent to extra-local actors (He, 2019b). This reform enables rural households to gain unequivocal title over their homestead and farmland, and has empowered rural households to contribute these land rights as equity in cooperative enterprises (Ren and Bian, 2017). The landowners who

contributed their land rights retain ownership of their land but gain shares in the cooperative. They receive dividends or profits based on the cooperative's performance, providing them with a steady income stream. The reform has also established the very first institutional framework for urban entities to legally lease and operate rural land (State Council, 2014). Between 2013 and 2020, approximately 3.5 million hectares of arable land were rented from smallholders by professional farmers and agricultural enterprises, and fixed asset investment in the agricultural sector increased from 0.8 to 2.5 trillion yuan (Tang et al., 2021).

While encouraging the participation of external actors, the government has also enacted multiple regulations and laws to secure channels for the participation of villagers in rural economic development. This is mainly achieved by promoting the establishment of rural collective economic entities such as cooperatives and other social enterprises. For instance, the central government has enacted the *Law on Rural Professional Cooperative* (《农民专业合作社法》) (National People's Congress, 2017) and published a draft of the *Law on Rural Collective Economic Organisation* (《集体经济组织法 (草案)》) (National People's Congress, 2023), which will endow these village collective economic organisations with “special legal person” status to enable them to access funding and tax advantages.

The active party-state also plays a crucial role in rebuilding community capacity and party leadership in rural governance through intensive party-building initiatives. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the party-building work<sup>15</sup> (党建工作) in rural areas has been carried out in parallel with the aforementioned strategy to enhance rural socioeconomic connectivity. Since 2013, and drawing on the ideological discourse of the Maoist era,<sup>16</sup> the Xi administration has initiated the CPC Mass-line Education Campaign (党的群众路线

---

<sup>15</sup> Party-building refers to the activities and processes that seek to strengthen and improve the organizational capacity, ideological cohesion, discipline, integrity and overall effectiveness of the CPC.

<sup>16</sup> Mass-line (群众路线) is the ideological discourse initiated by Mao Zedong to guide CPC governance. It emphasizes the importance of closely aligning the party's work with the interests and aspirations of the masses, particularly the working class and peasants.

线教育实践活动) against corrupted and ineffective rural party organisations, the legacy of state withdrawal in the early Open Reform period (Yuen, 2014). Many inactive village cadres have been replaced by more capable and locally-prestigious people, who are often younger and more educated. Meanwhile, the campaign also offers greater financial support to rural party organisations by directing more funds for party-building projects.

Since the NRRS, greater emphasis has been placed on establishing clearer regulations and evaluation mechanisms for village cadres, so that they are transform them into the party's vanguard in rural governance. A notable governance reform in this regard is the One Shoulder Pole (“一肩挑”改革) reform of village cadres (CPC Central Committee, 2019), by which the elected director of the village committee and village-owned economic organisations is required to be the village party secretary selected by the town party committee (Yi, 2020). This reform effectively transforms village cadres into the counterparts of traditional *xiang-li* officials (see Section 4.1), with the distinction that these cadres are appointed and supervised directly by the upper-level party committees to oversee the comprehensive governance of rural communities; thereby granting China's highest authority (i.e., the Central Party Committee) a greater degree of control over rural affairs compared to the imperial era.

Furthermore, from 2019, upper-level governments are required to send outstanding officials to serve as “first secretaries” (第一书记) in rural communities, and link relational resources and coordinate party work at the community level (CPC Central Committee, 2019). This arrangement complements the village party secretary's focus on managing village affairs and representing the interests of the village residents, and through so doing enhances the effective top-down delivery of public resources and directives. These actors are identified as potential village party secretaries and cadres and thus ensure the party leadership in the pluralistic rural society.

The expansion of the party power in rural communities has also been accompanied by the elimination of resurgent traditional informal local forces (such as clans and gangs) since the early Open Reform. From 2018 to 2021, the central government launched the Sweeping Black and Evil Force Campaign (扫黑除恶行动), which aimed to crack down

on underworld criminal forces and break their links with local party-state governments, in order to reinforce the foundation of the party-state regime (State Council, 2018b). Controlling and cracking down on rural corrupt officials, gangsters, and familial clan forces were the focal points of this campaign (State Council, 2021). According to data from the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, by the end of 2020, a total of 13,272 criminal organisations and groups were dismantled nationwide, and 41,700 involved village cadres were dismissed (Procuratorate Daily, 2020).

In summary, the active party-state has utilised the rural restructuring process stimulated by the NSCC to rebuild rural party leadership that was weakened during the early Open Reform period. Through extensive party-state interventions, the party has incorporated public investment and party authority as indispensable socio-institutional foundations for rural development and governance, and through so doing has curbed and lessened the influence of previously resurgent local forces whilst also fostering activated communities. The concept of activated communities within the NRRS also reflects a continuation of the overarching theme of national integration in Chinese rural development; present since the imperial era.

## **5.2 What is neo-exogenous development? A party-led networked approach towards national integration**

The previous section provided an overview of the governance context of NED, characterized by the active party-state and activated communities. By contrasting the NED with mainstream international rural development theories (Chapter Two) and historical Chinese rural development practices (Chapter Four), this section conceptualises the NED which is, in short, a predominantly exogenous development structure with steered endogenous features.

As discussed in Section 2.1, if rural areas are considered to be spaces of relationships, then rural marginalization, the key global rural development challenge, can be seen to be the result of a scarcity of relational resources. This scarcity is particularly pronounced in rural China, the endogenous development of which has been constrained by the divisive urban-rural dualistic system (see Section 3.2). This thesis argues that the ideal model of



the NED revolves around utilizing party-state actors to direct or activate various relational resources in rural communities and generating party-led actor networks to facilitate collaborative innovation between local and extra-local actors.

Based on the analysis of NRRS framework, the ideal model of the NED is depicted in Figure 5.1. Initially, the central government uses multi-scalar party networks to mobilise the entire party-state apparatus and social sector to focus on rural development. Various state programmes are then initiated in accordance with the principles and objectives set by the central party committee. These programmes would subsequently be assigned to local governments through the PBG framework. During the programme implementation phase, local governments, particularly at the county and town levels, would engage with communities and external stakeholders. Party organisations would play a vital role in coordinating the actions and distribution of benefits among the diverse actors involved, in order to facilitate effective collaborative innovation. If the unique governance background of NED and the historical logic behind it is set aside, and it is instead viewed from the perspective of social innovation theory, then the NED model would repair and construct bonding and bridging relationships by establishing strong linking relationships. In detail, through these mechanisms, marginalised rural areas would be able to access linking relational resources from state programmes, bridge relational resources from urban actors such as enterprises and universities, and restore bonding relational resources through the combined stimulation of these resources and increasing party-led community capacity-building activities.

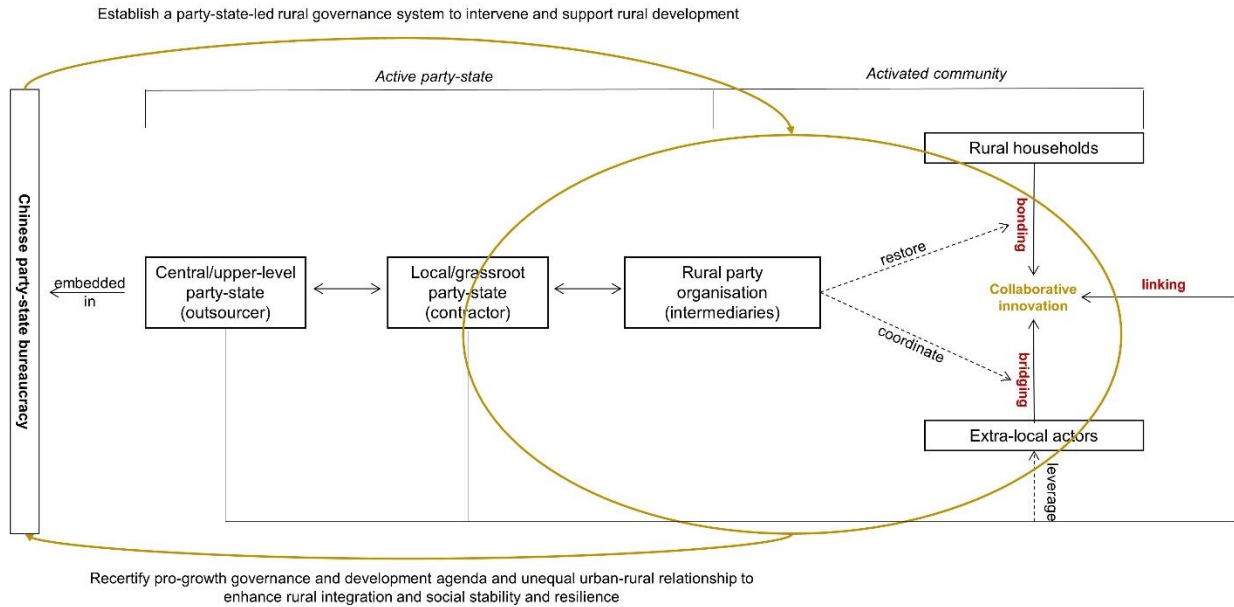


Figure 5.1 Mechanism of Neo-exogenous Development (Source: Author's Own)

The NED should be distinguished from mainstream international rural development models (Table 5.2). While the NED approach is marked by a reaching-in party-state and great amount of public investment, it should be distinguished from conventional 'exogenous development' model (see Section 2.1). The NED recognises the importance of engaging various local and extra-local stakeholders, as reflected in NRRS legislation and other relevant policies. The agency and creativity of rural households in rural development have been particularly highlighted by the Xi administration (National People's Congress, 2021). Additionally, the NED encourages local governments and communities to explore context-specific models for economic development and social governance. To accommodate local innovations, the policies of the Chinese central government have deliberately incorporated elements of ambiguity, and particularly so in areas such as goal setting and performance evaluation (Zhou and Lian, 2020). In addition, and as previously mentioned, the NRRS enables rescaling through state programmes by which grassroots authorities can be endowed with administrative, financial and human resources for territorial revitalisation and embeds marginalised rural areas into multi-scalar governance networks (Gao et al., 2023). These features contrast with the traditional remote decision-making of the exogenous model. Furthermore, the objectives of NRRS, as evident from the existing policy framework and political discourse,

encompass diverse aspects of sustainable rural development, such as farmland protection and social stability. The emphasis on national integration and socio-political stability distinguishes NED from the productivist exogenous development model.

The NED should also be distinguished from conventional networked development approaches which are represented by neo-endogenous approaches and nexogenous development. In (neo-) endogenous approaches (see Section 2.1), civic voluntary associations are expected to play charismatic roles in leading rural development (Osti, 2000). However, in the NED context, non-governmental entities do not have direct formal access to participate in the design and contracting of national programmes. Their decision-making and discretionary powers over funding and implementation strategies are relatively limited compared to the European LEADER programme (Cejudo and Navarro, 2020). The resurrection of rural party organisations and increasing party-building activities in rural communities under the Xi administration indicate that the goal of NED is not to establish self-help communities which operate independently from the public sector.

Therefore, while both NED and nexogenous development emphasise the need to foster societal concern with regards to rural development and involve government and large enterprises with mainstream resources to structurally address rural marginalisation, NED is distinct in that it is grounded in both the traditional Chinese governance goal of rural integration and the rising party-state-led social governance system that has existed since the Xi Era. As a result, the NED is marked by a party-state-led societal mobilisation that goes beyond advancing rural socio-economic conditions. It represents the effort to reconstruct geographically and socio-politically remote and dispersed rural communities into activated communities and integrate them into the country's broader social fabric led by the central authority.

Table 5.1 NED and mainstream International rural development paradigms (source: Author's own)

	<b>Exogenous</b>	<b>Neo-endogenous</b>	<b>Nexogenous</b>	<b>Neo-exogenous</b>
<b>Imagination of the rural</b>	Space of production	Space of relations	Space of relations	Space of relations
<b>Force of development</b>	State and urban growth pole	Local community and other actors within the network/relationships	State and other nationally-operating organisations, local community and extra-local actors within the networks	State, local community and other extra-local actors within the state programme networks
<b>Main issues of rural development</b>	Lack of productivity	1) Lack of community capacity 2) Social exclusion 3) Lack of social connections and networks	1) Lack of community capacity 2) Lack of social connections and networks 3) Structural and institutionalised marginalisation	1) Lack of community capacity, mainly in self-organisation and active cooperation with state; 2) Lack of social connections and networks; 3) Structural and institutionalised marginalisation
<b>Methods of rural development</b>	1) Rural industrialisation, commercialisation, and specialisation 2) New employment and external investment	Social innovation to build collaborative actor networks to connect local and extra-local actors	1) Common concern and strategy against rural marginalisation; 2) Radical social innovation to build collaborative actor networks to connect local, extra-local, and public sector or nationally-operating organisations	1) Common concern and strategy against rural marginalisation through political mobilisation; 2) Locally-adaptive rural development initiatives based on state programmes; 3) Collaborative innovation towards party-state-led actor networks that connect local, extra-local, and state actors; 4) Construct activated communities that have knowledge and capacity to cooperate with the party-state

In light of China's own rural development history (see Chapter Four), the NED could be viewed as an upgrade to the highly exogenous PBG framework, and to incorporate enhanced endogenous features into rural development practices. However, in contrast to the PBG framework, the NED shows a higher level of state intervention and prominence in the overall structure of rural governance structure, and its aims to rebuild rural party leadership and community capacity in the context of rural restructuring. The delicate balance between relatively endogenous implementation and an exogenous governance structure is achieved through the resurrection of rural party organizations inherited from Maoist Era, and also reflects the emerging trend of state government to party governance that arose in the Xi Era. With steered endogenous features, the NED still represents a campaign-style approach that is similar to the Rural Collectivisation Movement, but is less frenzied and focused on tasks – such as improving bottom-up initiatives in business – that are less suited to an 'all hands-on deck' approach.

The NED should also be distinguished from the local-state corporatism that occurred during the early Open Reform Era (see Section 3.2). Unlike the 1980s, town- and village-level authorities now have much less discretion in terms of local financial resources such as bank loans and public budgets; these have been centralised since the late 1990s. In the local-state corporatist model that existed during the 1980s and 1990s, community involvement was driven by town governments that were seeking to capture revenue from rural collective economic organizations (i.e., TVEs). In contrast, within the NED model, community participation aims to ensure the effective implementation of central government's NRRS policies as well as a more equitable distribution of development outcomes to residents. Rather than economic profits, township governments are mainly motivated by top-down performance evaluation pressures, and focus on both securing top-down state programmes and maximising their political achievements through approval from higher authorities.

In general, this chapter has examined the transformations in rural governance structures that have occurred under the leadership of the Xi administration and has also

conceptualized the NED. Under the Xi administration, there has been a transition from state government to party governance in the social governance system, with a growing focus on social and political stability alongside economic resilience as salient policy concerns. In line with this, the central government introduced the NRRS, which utilises a multi-scalar party network to mobilize the state apparatus and society as a whole. Therefore, analysis of the NRRS should not be confined to viewing it merely as a sectoral policy in agriculture and rural areas. Instead, it must be contextualized within the evolving backdrop of governance that underlies it. The NRRS aims to establish an active party-state that hierarchically directs political will and public investment into rural areas. It also promotes the formation of activated communities to build place-led actor networks led by rural party organizations to implement policies from the party-state. Through these efforts, the NED aims to establish/revitalise linking, bridging, and bonding relational relationships in rural areas and address issues of rural marginalisation.

China has experienced significant transformations in areas such as its economic growth patterns, its social governance models, its rural demographics, and its socio-economic structures. Within this context, the NED has emerged as a novel networked development model that reflects the convergence of multiple transformative forces. This complex socio-power structure also means that the implementation of NED will inevitably encounter multiple structural contradictions created by the historical governance legacies and emerging party governance. Among these are the challenges of restraining the entrenched pro-growth agenda of the previous social governance system. Equally significant is the potential risk of collaborative innovation processes transforming into local state-led showcasing projects for political tournament or becoming dominated by urban capital. Furthermore, there exists the critical task of balancing intensive programme-based interventions by the party-state with the bottom-up developmental needs of rural communities.

In fact, recent studies have identified some practical challenges associated with the implementation of NRRS policies (Wu and Liu, 2020; Wang and Zhang, 2017; Yu et al., 2020). However, current studies on the NRRS practices often lack a comprehensive conceptual framework. This absence hinders the effective deconstruction of the emerging

Chinese rural development paradigm and the establishment of connections with existing international theoretical discussions. Consequently, these studies tend to be discursive and lack systematic analysis of the operational mechanism of NRRS policies. There is a need to explore the dynamics among various elements: the central party-state and clientelist state-society relations towards rural integration (both representing structural aspects), as well as local and grassroots party-states and social actors (representing agencies). Understanding these dynamics is crucial, especially considering the vast and diverse nature of rural China.

This thesis selects the Modern Agricultural Zone (MAZ) programme, a typical NED policy, as the example through which it unveils the dynamics of NED practice. Three rural areas were, as subsequent chapters discuss investigated to assess whether the new actor networks generated by the NED policy can enable rural households to retain the value from development and finally advance the socio-economic well-being of rural areas in China. The following chapter illustrates why this thesis chose MAZs as its research object and how these MAZs were researched.

## Chapter Six: MAZ, Study Areas and Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodologies employed within this study to examine the practical mechanisms and dynamics of NED. Section 6.1 outlines the MAZ policy and explains why this policy was selected as a representative example of NED. Section 6.2 describes the rationale behind selecting case studies from various differentiated rural areas in China. Section 6.3 provides background information on the study areas. Section 6.4 illustrates the analytical framework used by the author to guide the fieldwork investigation and data collection process. Section 6.5 outlines the research methodology employed in this study, and focuses particularly on the processes of data collection and protection, as well as the subsequent steps that were taken with regard to data analysis.

### 6.1 What and why is MAZ?

A Modern Agricultural Zone (MAZ) is a designated area specifically designed for the development and promotion of modern agricultural activities (e.g., crop cultivation, livestock farming, technological research and application, agro-processing and so on), and seeks to enhance agricultural productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. This area-based initiative aims to leverage local and extra-local resources, communities, expertise, and market potential to contribute to territorial development.

MAZ was chosen as it represents a typical policy of NED. First, in terms of political representativeness, MAZ is a state programme that was initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in 2017, which was then restructured to MARA in 2018. MAZ was subsequently listed in the “Action Plan of NRRS (2018-2022)” and the *Law on Promoting Rural Revitalisation* (2021), making it a flagship NRRS programme. The central government has provided significant economic and political incentives to promote the MAZ programme. For instance, candidate areas for “National-level MAZ” designation can receive a substantial amount of central subsidies, amounting to 100 million yuan in total. Additionally, they are eligible for provincial subsidies that vary depending on the specific province. Upon successful completion of a final evaluation, the central government commits to providing hundreds of millions of yuan in subsidies, (determined by the



evaluation score attained). Moreover, areas that achieve “National-level MAZ” status are prioritized for other national-level state programmes. These include programmes such as the “National-level Rural Complex”, which grants subsidies of over 150 million yuan over a three-year period, as well as the “Digital Agriculture Pilot Project”, which provides 30 million yuan in subsidies. These designated rural areas also have access to low-interest loans from the China Development Bank, and are also given the opportunity to receive additional construction land quotas from the government. Furthermore, and in addition to the economic incentives, the designation of a “National-level MAZ” enables the local government to establish an additional deputy county/division-level administration within its local government structure. This leads to an increase in both the budget and the number of personnel within the administrative apparatus. Moreover, the lead official of the MAZ, usually positioned at the town/section level, often receives promotion opportunities to the higher level.

MAZ exemplifies the NED approach as a consequence of its hybrid and networked characteristics. As a state programme, the central government has established goals for MAZ, which mainly include ensuring the participation and benefit sharing of farmers, fostering and attracting agricultural enterprises, and promoting diversified and sustainable models of rural economic development (Table 6.1). To achieve these goals, the MARA has established top-down guiding principles (Table 6.2) and a systematic evaluation framework (Table 6.3). These technocratic frameworks encompass the selection criteria for “National-level MAZ”, the highest governmental honour for MAZ. Many of the evaluative indicators have specific quantitative targets which create top-down pressure to promote MAZ policy. For instance, the guidelines stipulate that local governments should employ various strategies to attract private investment including: government purchasing, public-private partnerships, and financial premium policies. They are also encouraged to explore value-sharing mechanisms between external actors and rural households such as long-term contracts, shareholding arrangements, and cooperatives. Obtaining the designation of “National-level MAZ” necessitates that local government units provide investment of over 300 million yuan and secure additional private investment in excess of 1.5 billion yuan.

However, these evaluative indicators are not mandatory, and the principle of MAZ, like many NED policies, remains intentionally vague so as to enable local adaptation and interpretation. Additionally, the MAZs are classified into different levels; ranging from national to town-level, and local government can define development goals, evaluation criteria, incentives and subsidies of sub-national-level MAZs. The distinctive amalgamation of an exogenous policy delivery structure and endogenous implementation features exemplifies the characteristic attributes of NED.

Table 6.1 Goals of MAZ Policy (adapted from MoA 2017)

Goals	Description
<b>Agricultural economy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Enhance and preserve the unique local, natural, and cultural characteristics of the agricultural sector;</li> <li>2) Attract and mobilize advanced technology and financial resources for the development of MAZs;</li> <li>3) Foster innovative integration of agriculture with other sectors, including processing, warehousing, logistics, tourism, and marketing;</li> <li>4) Expand the operational scale of agriculture and promote intensive farming practices, taking into account local natural and socio-economic capacities;</li> <li>5) Facilitate the transition towards high-tech, high-value, and environmentally friendly agricultural practices, showcasing and driving local agricultural modernization;</li> </ol>
<b>Social development</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Encourage the active participation of diverse stakeholders in the implementation of MAZs, utilizing the zone as a platform for experimentation and collaboration.</li> <li>2) Explore innovative delivery models that can greatly benefit local rural households and ensure their participation in and sharing of the economic gains derived from the further development of secondary and tertiary sectors.</li> <li>3) Promote the emergence of new actors in local agricultural development within MAZs, expanding beyond traditional smallholders. This includes supporting the establishment and growth of non-governmental actors, such as family farms, rural cooperatives, leading agro-enterprises, and rural start-up businesses.</li> </ol>

Table 6.2 Principles of MAZ Policy (Source: Adapted from MoA, 2017a)

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Government-guiding + market-driving</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Strengthen the leadership of government institutions through providing planning guidance, innovating operational mechanisms, offering policy incentives, and facilitating supportive services within MAZs;</li> <li>2) Leverage the strengths of social actors such as leading agro-enterprises and research institutes in the agricultural industry, as well as their expertise in investment, construction, marketing activities, and more, to improve the operational and delivery models of MAZs;</li> </ol>
<b>Agriculture-based + innovative diverse economy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Select and prioritize the development of advantageous agricultural industries based on local resources;</li> <li>2) Expand the value chain of the local industry and promoting the integration of agri-business across different sectors;</li> <li>3) Ensure that agricultural production remains the central activity within MAZs and prevent them from becoming solely processing enterprises;</li> </ol>
<b>Wide participation + rural households gains</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Exert the active and leading roles of agricultural enterprises in specific implementation;</li> <li>2) Attract diverse actors from all sectors to the implementation process of MAZ;</li> <li>3) Keep rural households' benefit at the centre of the policy implementation, explore mechanisms of value-making and value distribution to rural households, and create more jobs with higher incomes;</li> </ol>
<b>Green development + ecology-friendly</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Foster and support the growth of environmentally friendly agricultural businesses.</li> <li>2) Enhance waste and emissions management practices.</li> <li>3) Establish sustainable mechanisms for promoting green, circular, and low-carbon development.</li> </ol>

Table 6.3 Evaluation Framework of National-Level MAZ (Source: Adapted from MoA, 2017a)

Aspects	Indicators
<b>Economic and physical scale</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Gross agricultural output</li> <li>2) Planned area of MAZ (coverage rate of leading agriculture product&gt;60%)</li> <li>3) Output of leading agricultural industry</li> <li>4) Total area of cultivated land and animal husbandry</li> </ol>
<b>Advanced agricultural economy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Gross production value of MAZ (total value&gt;3 billion yuan; ratio between processing and agricultural industry&gt;3:1)</li> <li>2) Gross production value of leading agri-businesses (identify primary and secondary industries)</li> <li>3) Percentage of leading agricultural product that has been converted to the processing industry</li> <li>4) Number of brands that are recognised as 'national or provincial-level'</li> </ol>
<b>Technological support</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Coverage rate of high-quality seeds</li> <li>2) Mechanisation rate of agriculture plantation</li> <li>3) Investment amount of development, introduction and promotion of new varieties or technologies</li> <li>4) Number of research platforms over 'national or provincial-level research institutes'</li> <li>5) Number of professional technicians</li> </ol>
<b>Intensive farming</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Percentage of appropriate scale-farming</li> <li>2) Number of leading enterprises that dominate production activities (identify national-and provincial-level leading enterprises)</li> <li>3) Number of cooperatives involved in production activities</li> <li>4) Number of family farms involved in production activities</li> </ol>
<b>Green development</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Scale of certified green and organic agriculture businesses</li> <li>2) Number of certified green and organic food products (pass rate of product in spot check&gt;99%)</li> <li>3) Disposal rate of agricultural waste (&gt;80%)</li> <li>4) Usage rate of chemical fertiliser in main agricultural product</li> <li>5) Usage rate of pesticide in main agricultural product</li> </ol>
<b>Betterment of rural households</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Number of jobs created by MAZ (identify number of employees in secondary and tertiary industries)</li> <li>2) Average disposable income of rural households working in MAZ (target: 30% higher than local average level)</li> </ol>

<b>Financial support</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Public fiscal investment (identify central and local share of investment)</li> <li>2) Balance of loan from financial institutes</li> <li>3) Private investment amount</li> </ol>
--------------------------	--

Another reason why MAZ was selected as this study's research subject is its extensive geographic distribution. By 2021, there were 87 national-level MAZs and 101 areas being considered as candidates for this distinction, along with over 5,000 sub-national-level MAZs which spanned provincial and county-levels (Jiang et al., 2021). The allocation of national-level MAZs and candidate zones across various regions in China is relatively balanced, with 65 located in the Eastern region, 68 in the Western region, and 55 in the Central region (Table 6.4)

Table 6.4 Regional distribution of national-level MAZ and candidates (Source: Author's Own)

Region	Province	Number
East	Beijing	4
	Fujian	5
	Guangdong	11
	Hainan	4
	Hebei	7
	Jiangsu	8
	Liaoning	5
	Shandong	10
	Shanghai	2
	Tianjin	3
	Zhejiang	6
		<b>SUM</b>
Central	Anhui	6
	Henan	8
	Heilongjiang	11
	Hubei	5
	Hunan	7
	Jilin	6
	Jiangxi	6
	Shanxi	6
	<b>SUM</b>	<b>55</b>
West	Chongqing	6
	Gansu	5
	Guangxi	6
	Guizhou	7
	Inner Mongolia	4
	Ningxia	3
	Qinghai	3
	Shaanxi	6
	Sichuan	11
	Tibet	6
	Xinjiang	7
Yunnan	4	
	<b>SUM</b>	<b>68</b>

Overall, MAZ typifies the NED approach by ostensibly prioritising communities' interests and stimulating collaborative innovation among various stakeholders to generate locally-tailored implementation strategies. Local states have control rights over local-level MAZs, with specific arrangements varying by region, while the central ministry provides a technocratic evaluative framework to conduct their development and ensure that resources are used towards the central vision.

## **6.2 How were the MAZs selected?**

The primary objective of this study's fieldwork was to examine the dynamics of NED practice and assess its effectiveness in enabling local communities to capture and retain the benefits derived from rural development. Despite variability in the degree of national integration, rural China continues to be differentiated by a complex interplay between the exercise of state power, intermediaries, and rural households. With an increasing emphasis on networked rural development, a differentiated rural society is now scaffolded by a mix of social-relational networks (comprising a mix of linking, bridging and bonding ties) across which power is contested by a range of stakeholders. Given the differentiated nature of rural areas in China, this study had to categorise various typologies of rural areas in order to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the mechanisms and impacts of NED.

One of the most significant relation-based typologies of rural society in Europe is Murdoch et al.'s (2003) notion of the contested countryside, which breaks rural England down into four types depending on the origin and exercise of power (Table 6.5). The differentiation of rural England (excluding the clientelist countryside) is said to be rooted in property ownership, particularly land property, which has been diversified by the interactions and movements of a bourgeoisie in rural areas.

Table 6.5 Typology of Rural Areas in England (Source: adapted from Murdoch et al., 2003)

Type of countryside	Description
<b>Preserved countryside</b>	These rural areas, located in close proximity to major cities, possess valuable landscape resources. The governance of these areas is predominantly influenced by middle-class residents who employ planning strategies to safeguard the rural environment according to their own envisioned ideals.
<b>Contested countryside</b>	These rural areas lie beyond the commuting circle and primarily prioritize local agricultural or commercial development as their development vision. However, the emergence of middle-class groups brings about contestation regarding this vision.
<b>Paternalist countryside</b>	These rural areas are predominantly governed by large estate owners or prominent farmers who shape the development vision. Such areas typically have a smaller middle-class population.
<b>Clientelist countryside</b>	These rural areas are geographically remote and economically marginalized. The industrial structure is predominantly agricultural, with significant state intervention. Consequently, development in these areas relies heavily on external investments and is characterized by a coalition between the state and agricultural interest groups. The primary focus of development efforts is on employment generation and the welfare of the community.

Since the rural restructuring process stimulated by the NSCC, China has also experienced a middle-class influx, and an attendant rise in pastoralist nostalgia, which has led to a flourishing rural tourism industry and suburban property market, particularly in urban-rural fringe areas (Zhong and Xin, 2020; Wu, 2010). As in some parts of Europe, conflicts have arisen between the objectives of land-use planning and the investment returns sought by urban capital in China, which have been keen to develop new agri-entertainment businesses (Visser, 2010). As a result, Sturzaker and Law (2015) suggest that Murdoch and colleagues' contested countryside has emerged in rural China.

However, China has a distinct rural land tenure system. Land is in collective ownership and cannot be sold in the urban market (where land is state-owned). This dualist urban-rural land institution persisted even after Xi's Rural Land Rights Separation Reform (2014), which allowed extra-local actors to rent land from rural households. Consequently,



individual members of China's bourgeoisie have found themselves in a 'grey area' of rural governance. While they may live and work in rural areas and participate in community governance, they are not formal members of the rural collective economy that is based on village membership and are, therefore, unable to vote for village cadres. This also means that they cannot compete legally for rural development rights because they do not have the support from the state or rural elites (Paik and Lee, 2012).

Furthermore, the dualist urban-rural land institution and the central government's increasingly strict preservation of farmland have contributed to the predominance of agriculture in the rural economic structure. In contrast, processing and service industries tend to be concentrated in those suburban areas which surround the country's major cities and metropolitan regions (MoA, 2017b). This economic setup exhibits certain resemblances to the concept of the clientelist countryside. However, unlike the British case, clientelism in China does not occur between rural households and the state, but rather between rural households and intermediaries that bridge between the state and rural society (see Chapter Four). Therefore, it is not appropriate to apply the existing Western lens as a mechanism through which to classify Chinese rural areas.

Studies on rural typologies in China that have adopted either a relation-base lens or a governance perspective remains relatively limited, and existent relevant literature often focuses on topographic or economic aspects without deeply integrating these with community-level power relations and governance characters. Fei Xiaotong's seminal work on the 'Sunan' and 'Wenzhou' models of rural development were the first attempt to make sense of differentiated rural governance in China (Song, 2006). Thereafter, and from socio-cultural and historical perspectives, He (2007), built on extensive fieldwork, and identified three types of rural governance in China which provided an influential geographic view of rural governance in China (Table 6.6). The primary relationship utilised to classify the rural typologies in this study is the paternalistic bonding that exists between traditional consanguineous groups and rural households.

Table 6.6 He's Typology of Rural China (Source: adapted from He, 2012)

Type of rural areas	Description
<b>United village</b>	These villages are predominantly located in southern China, where rural households still exhibit a strong patriarchal identity. The leaders of local patriarchies maintain their influence and ability to unite the village community in response to state extraction. It is worth noting that the village cadres primarily consist of members from these local patriarchal structures;
<b>Fragmented village</b>	These villages are primarily situated in northern China, characterized by the presence of numerous small kinship-based interest groups that often compete with each other. This dynamic creates a fragmented power structure within the villages. Elite individuals within these villages tend to leverage state authority to influence cadre elections, aiming to benefit their own small interest groups, particularly when state policies increase the burden on the villages;
<b>Discrete village</b>	These villages are concentrated along the Yangtze River watershed in central China and northeastern China. The social fabric in these areas is highly atomistic, with the family unit becoming the primary unit of social identity. Affinity and friendship play a more significant role than traditional consanguineous and regionalist relationships. As a result, rural collective actions become costly, and rural households can be vulnerable when faced with a coalition of cadres and state authority.

This thesis argues that He's (2012) approach overestimates the significance of traditional consanguineous relationships whilst overlooking the increasing state intervention through PBG framework since the NSCC. In fact, in his recent studies, He (2019a; 2017) acknowledges that the transformation of the traditional rural governance agenda due to the growing influence of party-state, and the work of village cadres as the intermediaries has shifted from mitigating state extraction (the focus of the gentry) into competing for and distributing state resources within the community. As external resources have become the driving force behind rural development, traditional patriarchies and other consanguineous actor networks have been progressively marginalised in China's rural governance structure (Shen, 2020; 2014).

Given this, this thesis argues that if there is a modern typology of Chinese rural areas that has been shaped by engagement with, or distance from, the influence of the PBG. Some studies have identified community leadership and the abundance of local natural and

socio-economic resources as key factors which determine different patterns of governance (Li and Shen, 2020; Xiao, 2020; Yang, 2017). However, such approaches to classification have tended to overlook the impact of external actors. Gui and He (2021) investigated various stakeholders involved in the NRRS programme implementation, including the party-state government (extending to state-owned enterprises), intermediary agents (village-owned enterprises and other socio-economic organisations based on collective land ownership), civil society actors (scholars, planners, and religious organisations), and private enterprises. Their study identified local circumstances in which the power of these stakeholders varied. However, their typology was fine-grained, dealt with variations that were difficult to generalise, and pointed to the need for additional research to be undertaken on the outcomes underpinned by the power structures that arise from the PBG framework. Other studies, have focused on the differential impacts arising from the (1) scale, (2) form, and (3) operational models of the programmes across different areas (Yuan, 2012; He, 2011), but these lack a relation-based approach to classification.

Li (2013) conducted extensive fieldwork on governance types within China's rural areas from the perspective of PBG. His research provided crucial and enlightening insights for the classification methodology adopted in this thesis. Li's findings reveal that the allocation of projects to rural areas reflects and influences the relationships that exist between local and extra-local stakeholders and the governance structure of rural communities. Although Li did not employ the same social relationship classification (i.e., linking, bonding, and bridging) as this thesis, his research analysed the relationships between the government and villages, the cadres and masses within the rural communities, and the interactions between these actors and the private sector. As a result, the classification approach he adopted can be linked to NED and other networked development theories through the concept of social/collaborative innovation.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> In order to avoid the ideological connotations often associated with the concept of social innovation, which, as argued by Bock (2016), are often linked to the promotion of self-help communities and neoliberal ideologies, this thesis utilizes the term collaborative innovation to describe the multi-actor innovation and relationship-building processes in rural development. By using this term, this thesis seeks to bridge the networked development practices of both Western and Chinese contexts, facilitating knowledge exchange and promoting cross-context understanding.

Li identified three types of rural areas: receiving villages, binding villages, and striving villages (Table 5.7). In order to strengthen the connection between this classification and international theories, this thesis explains these three types of villages using the three types of social relationships.

In receiving villages, programmes are often directly assigned by higher-level governments which often have strong economy and sufficient fiscal resources, and the community plays a passive role in implementing these programmes. As a result, these rural areas are usually in coastal areas or near metropolitans. Village cadres primarily act as coordinators between the government and the community, and ensure the implementation of governmental directives. Receiving villages often exhibit a strong linking relationship, supported by top-down state programmes. Additionally, there is a strong bridging relationship directed by the private sector, which often has close ties with the local government.

Striving villages are commonly situated in regions with limited financial resources, particularly in central and western China. Within this context, the community takes an active role in seeking development opportunities, and they thus actively pursue programme resources from the government. Village cadres, who are often capable community leaders, play a critical role in leading community development and obtain more discretion in the programme implementation stage.

Binding villages are often found in areas with very limited financial resources, particularly in western China. In these areas, both the government and the communities rely on private sector investments to secure top-down programme resources. As a result, the allocation and execution of these resources often prioritize the interests and demands of the businesses involved. Within this context, the community members and village cadres assume a more passive role. Village cadres primarily focus on mitigating conflicts between the community and the private sector enterprises.

It is noteworthy that emerging domestic studies (see for instance, Shen and Zhang, 2019) suggest that the social relationships integral to community developments may transform

in accordance with alterations in external governance conditions, such as rescaling and top-down designation. This allows for possible interconversion between these types of villages within a community throughout the process of development; a process also noted within this study (see case studies, Chapter Seven and Nine). Therefore, by applying Li's village typology, this thesis does not aspire to furnish a precise, nationwide cartography of rural China, but rather to broadly inform the selection of case studies.

Table 6.7 Li's Typology of Rural China (Source: adapted from Li, 2013; Zhu, 2017)

Type of rural areas	Description	Relational structure	Geographic distribution & Social-economic features
<b>Receiving village</b>	<p>These villages often have considerable natural and social-economic resources. The investment scale of the programmes is often large and is underpinned by the wealth of local governments;</p> <p>The local government provides key leadership in the implementation stage and the projects under the programme are often arranged and outsourced to extra-local actors who have close relationship with the government;</p> <p>The participation of rural households in rural governance is limited and cadres are often state-facing. They act as the passive coordinators of the programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking: strong</li> <li>• Bonding: modest to weak</li> <li>• Bridging: strong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic: Developed rural areas in the Eastern China or near metropolitans</li> <li>• Social: Diverse socio-demographic conditions</li> <li>• Economic: mainly urban-industrialised employment + rural service economy</li> </ul>
<b>Striving village</b>	<p>These villages are located in areas where the local government have limited fiscal resources, and the villages must actively compete for the programmes</p> <p>The village cadres and grassroots governments play important roles in striving for programmes</p> <p>The scale of the programmes is relatively small but they can often serve the local needs or the visions of community leaders.</p> <p>Rural cadres have broader discretionary power during the implementation stage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking: modest</li> <li>• Bonding: weak</li> <li>• Bridging: modest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic: central and western regions of China;</li> <li>• Social: depopulation + ageing society</li> <li>• Economic: agriculture-dominated local employment + rural-to-urban migrants</li> </ul>

---

<b>Binding village</b>	<p>These villages are usually located in lagging-behind areas in which the local state has very limited fiscal resources, and development is dependent on extra-local investment;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking: weak</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographic: mostly western regions of China;</li> </ul>
	<p>Grassroots government and enterprises play leadership roles in the implementation of programmes, and many projects are designed to meet the needs of extra-local investment;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bonding: weak</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social: depopulation + ageing society</li> </ul>
	<p>The communities are bound to the contracts between enterprises and the government. The task of village cadres is mainly to navigate the possible contradictions that may exist between enterprises and rural households.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridging: modest to high</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic: smallholder agriculture-dominated local employment + rural-to-urban migrants</li> </ul>

---

### 6.3 The Case Study areas

This study selected three villages situated in the core development area of three MAZs, located in two provinces, and spanning both eastern and western China (Figure 6.1), to analyse the mechanisms and effects of NED in different types of rural China. To uphold the privacy of the subjects involved in this study, pseudonyms are employed for place names below the provincial level and for all interviewees (including enterprises, hotels, and other socio-economic entities).



Figure 6.1 Map of study areas (rough location, only to indicate the province) (Source: Author's own)

(1) *Binding Village: Bamboo MAZ and Lanjing Village, Qianfen County of Sichuan*

Qianfen is a county within Maozhan Prefecture, Sichuan Province. It was a typical small city in western China. According to the Qianfen Statistical Bureau (2022), the county had a *hukou* population of 190,900 people in 2021. However, the residential population was estimated to be approximately 167,990 people (Qianfen Statistical Bureau, 2022), suggesting a depopulation trend within the county. The county spanned an area of 387km<sup>2</sup> and included seven town-level jurisdictions which governed both urban and rural areas (Qianfen Statistical Bureau, 2022). The urbanisation level of Qianfen was 43.17% (Qianfen Statistical Bureau, 2022).

In 2021, the county's annual GDP was about 10 billion yuan (approximately 1.44 billion USD), with agriculture playing a significant role in its economic structure (Qianfen Statistical Bureau, 2022). The proportion of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries

was 13.7%, 39%, and 47.3%, respectively (Qianfen Statistical Bureau, 2022). The average disposable income of the urban population was 37,743 yuan, while the income of the rural population was 21,134 yuan. These figures indicate a noticeable development gap between urban and rural areas (Qianfen Statistical Bureau, 2022).

In 2021, the general budgetary revenue of Qianfen Government (mainly from disposable tax revenue and transfer payments) was 605 million yuan, while the fund revenue (mainly from land releasing fees) was 1.6 billion yuan (Qianfen Finance Bureau, 2022). Local government debt was 2.9 billion yuan. The level of fiscal revenue was ranked as fifth out of a total of six sub-jurisdictions of Maozhan Prefecture; indicating the relatively weak fiscal capacity of Qianfen (Qianfen Finance Bureau, 2022).

Qianfen County has a rich historical legacy in the bamboo weaving industry. In 2011, a Bamboo MAZ was established in the northern rural areas of Qianfen. The zone has an area of 8.56km<sup>2</sup>. Figure 6.2 illustrates an aerial view of the core development area of the MAZ (Qianfen Government, 2022). The goal of the MAZ was to integrate local bamboo production, processing, with art and exhibition spaces and tourism activities so as to enhance the brand identity of the local bamboo economy and improve the socio-economic profile of rural households. By 2021, the total production value of the bamboo industry in the zone was over 3.5 billion yuan, and accounted for 99% of the gross production value of the zone, as well as 92% of the entire value of the bamboo industry in Qianfen (Bamboo MAZ Management Committee, 2022a).





Figure 6.2 Aerial view of core development area of Bamboo MAZ (source: Qianfen Government, 2022)

Lanjing Village is in the core development area of Bamboo MAZ, and is an example of a 'binding village'. Lanjing was a typical lagging-behind area in Western China. Its *hukou* registered population was about 6,000 people, but the actual number of residents was 4,814 (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a). The majority of the working-age population had migrated to urban areas for employment opportunities. Based on interviews conducted with government officials (R2), villagers (R5-R7), and village cadres (R3&R4), it was revealed that prior to the implementation of the MAZ programme, the living environment in the village was characterised by poor conditions, that it had a polluted and smelly creek, and that there was a shortage of the basic infrastructure needed to keep the streets clean. There was, for instance, no paved road connecting the village to the outside world. The majority of local people were engaged in smallholder agriculture. The income of the collective economy was only 7,200 yuan, and the income per capita of Lanjing Village was 19,642 yuan, below the country's average level in 2018 (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a).

The industrial foundation of the MAZ project was initially established through investments from foreign charitable foundations and private enterprise capital. Due to its strong bridging relational resources and limited linking and bonding relational resources, Lanjing Village represents a relatively typical case. However, after the government officially initiated and invested in the MAZ programme, Lanjing Village began to exhibit characteristics of both striving and receiving village types, and the socio-spatial conditions

of Lanjing also improved (Figure 6.3). The development of Bamboo MAZ and Lanjing Village is commented upon in Chapter Seven.



Figure 6.3 A glimpse of Lanjing Village from an aerial perspective in 2021 (source: Qianfen Government, 2022)

*(2) Striving Village: Orange MAZ and Qianjiachi Village, Qianfen County of Sichuan*

Orange MAZ is another MAZ in Qianfen County (Figure 6.4). It is a Provincial-level MAZ that was established in 2015. Qianfen County has gained recognition for its renowned Ponkan oranges. By 1999, Ponkan oranges accounted for 90% of the total yield of agricultural industry in Qianfen. The Orange MAZ covers an area of 29 km<sup>2</sup>, and encompasses 6 villages in Ditai Town and Guo Town. The zone was initially established under the name “Ponkan Zone”. However, to align with the national MAZ policy and compete for programme resources, it was renamed in 2019 as Orange MAZ. The zone contributed approximately 40% of the total production value of Qianfen's orange industry in 2021; some 1.8 billion yuan (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022b).

Qianjiachi Village used to be a listed impoverished village in the core development area of the Orange MAZ (Figure 6.5). Before the initiation of the agricultural zone programme, the average annual income of Qianjiachi was just 7,400 yuan in 2014, and the residential population stood at approximately 2,500, with 30% of its population being over 60 years

old (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2022). About 50 households were registered as “county-level impoverished households” (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2022).

Compared to Bamboo MAZ, Orange MAZ has received relatively less financial and administrative support from the county government and, as a result, there it has benefitted from fewer linking relational resources when it comes to the process of rural revitalisation. However, this has provided the rural community with more opportunities for self-development and autonomy. Within the context of Qianjiachi Village's development, the village secretary has played a pivotal leadership role in fields such as rebuilding cadre-community relationships and social cohesion, as well as competing for local governmental programme resources. Qianjiachi was thus selected as this study's example of ‘striving village’, and its development process is discussed in Chapter Eight.



Figure 6.4 A view of core development area of Orange MAZ (source: Qianfen Government, 2022)



Figure 6.5 A glimpse of Qianjiachi Village from an aerial perspective in 2021 (source: Qianfen Government, 2022)

*(3) Receiving Village: Fruit MAZ and Yangmatang Village, Lianyin County of Jiangsu*

Lianyin is a county-level city located in Chenjun Prefecture in Jiangsu Province; an advanced economy in coastal area. In 2021, the total *hukou* population of Lianyin was 785,500 people, with a real residential population of over 804,300 (Lianyin Statistical Bureau, 2022). Lianyin covered an area of 1535 km<sup>2</sup> and governs 10 town-level jurisdictions (Lianyin Statistical Bureau, 2022). The urbanisation level<sup>18</sup> was 60.41%, and the annual GDP was 126.1 billion yuan (about 18.1 billion USD); the primary industry (mainly agriculture) accounted for only 4.5% (Lianyin Statistical Bureau, 2022). The income gap between urban and rural areas was similar to that of Qianfen, but the income level of Lianyin was much higher than that of Qianfen. The average disposable income of the urban population was 60,560 yuan, and the income of the rural population was 33,371 yuan (Lianyin Statistical Bureau, 2022).

Lianyin achieved significantly higher fiscal revenue compared to Qianfen. However, and similar to Qianfen, the local government's financial resources heavily relied on land revenues. In 2021, the general budgetary revenue was 7.8 billion yuan, and the fund

---

<sup>18</sup> In China, the urbanisation rate is calculated as the ratio of the urban residential population to the total population, and is expressed as a percentage.

revenue was 27.9 billion yuan whilst the local government's debt exceeded 29 billion yuan (Lianyin Finance Bureau, 2022). Both counties exhibited unfavourable financial conditions.

Jiangsu Province was one of the earliest regions to have experimented with the agricultural zone policy; a precursor to the MAZ programme of China. In 2009, the Lianyin government established a 42-square-kilometer Provincial-level Fruit MAZ around the Caoqiu Mountain, a hilly area. However, due to the local government's desire to promote tourism, the Fruit MAZ was incorporated into a county-level Resort Zone in 2016. The provincial-level designation of the Fruit MAZ resulted in the elevation of the new zone to a Provincial-level Resort Zone in 2018, which covered an area of 51 km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 6.6). Meanwhile, the administrative institution of the Fruit Zone was not officially abolished and the majority of the previous administrative team transitioned into the new Management Committee of the Resort Zone. Based on interviews conducted with officials from the Management Committee, it was found that the development tasks and requirements of the zone still align with the MAZ policy of the central government. The zone of Lianyin, despite its changed names, thus remains a suitable research object. To maintain writing consistency and enable comparisons with other cases, this thesis refers to the zone by its former name, "Fruit MAZ."



Figure 6.6 A view of core development area of Fruit MAZ (source: Fruit MAZ Management Committee, 2022)

The Yangmatang Village, a natural village of Shengxiang Village in the core area of the MAZ, was selected as an example of a 'receiving village.' Yangmatang, comprises 259

individuals, and was a 'natural village'<sup>19</sup> within the jurisdiction of Shengxiang Village (Figure 6.7). The village covered an area of approximately 33 hectares. It was founded about 150 years ago by Wenzhou migrants from Zhejiang Province.



Figure 6.7 A glimpse of Yangmatang Village from an aerial perspective in 2022 (source: Author's own, 2022)

Despite being situated in the core development area of the MAZ, Yangmatang, as a typical hilly region, has experienced lagged development. According to village records (Yangmatang Village Committee, 2022), the average personal income in Yangmatang was less than 20,000 yuan per year in 2017; lower than the provincial average. In an interview conducted for this study, the village director recalled that prior to 2017, Yangmatang lacked proper connectivity to the outside world and was considered a "ghost village" as young people left in search of employment opportunities in urban areas. As a result, Yangmatang faced scarcities with regard to both bonding and bridging relational resources.

The Fruit MAZ programme has played a role in promoting the development of the rural region in which Yangmatang is situated. However, the village itself did not experience significant growth until it was designated as a demonstrative site for a provincial-level key

---

<sup>19</sup> A natural village (自然村) is an official term refers to an informal settlement or community that forms organically based on familial ties, geographical proximity, or other local factors. An administrative village (行政村) is a formal administrative unit recognized by the government, usually composed of several natural villages. Except for Yangmatang Village, the term 'village' as used in this thesis pertains to the concept of an administrative village.

programme in 2018. Following this designation, the village has received considerable public investments from the MAZ Management Committee and the county government. The development of Yangmatang village has been predominantly driven by interventions from the government, with limited active involvement from the community or the private sector. As a result, it can be characterized as a typical ‘receiving village’, the development process of which is analysed in Chapter Nine.

#### **6.4 Analytical framework**

This study’s research unveils the practical mechanisms and the effectiveness of the MAZ policy, and examines whether the NED paradigm can improve the socio-economic well-being of communities in differentiated rural China. Considering the networked nature of NED, this thesis explores these practical dynamics from a ‘relation-based’ perspective. To achieve this, the study adopted a qualitative case study approach, which drew on current prevailing international research methods and was particularly suited to the context of limited access to detailed, community-level statistics in China.

As discussed in Section 2.1, many existent studies have suggested that an effective networked development process entails collaborative innovation between diverse stakeholders. Its essence lies in the production and reproduction of relationships and relational networks, which ultimately enhance the socio-economic and connectivity of marginalised rural communities and external entities (see, for instance, Bock, 2016; Bosworth et al., 2015; Neumeier, 2012; Xin et al., 2022). To grasp the often-intangible nature of the relationships and relational networks that exist, and particularly those which fall under the categories of linking, bridging, and bonding, this research provides an analytical framework which enables study of the evolution of these relationships in NED practice.

The analytical framework was originally developed using the theoretical foundation of the thesis which encompasses Chinese and Western networked development paradigms, along with insights from relevant existing studies on analysing policy impacts of rural areas (Douglas, 2018; Frank and Reiss, 2014; Gkartzios et al., 2022; Gallent et al., 2019; Verdini, 2021). In order to enhance the analytical framework's precision, two pilot studies

were carried out in Sichuan and Jiangsu provinces in, respectively, March and April of 2022. The outcomes of these pilot studies helped the author to refine the analytical framework which is presented in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8 Analytical framework on the changes of relationships and relational resources in NED practice (source: Author's own)

	<b>Analytical dimensions</b>	<b>Analytical elements</b>
<b>Linking</b> <b>(party state - community)</b>	Economic support from party state	1) Priority of rural areas in local development agenda; 2) Public investment and subsidies from government, state-owned enterprise, universities and official research institutes, and other public actors in the rural areas;
	Institutional support and mainstream resources from party state	1) Institutional support for rural development in administration, planning, finance and taxation; 2) Support for rural development in infrastructure, living environment and public service;
	Flexibility, efficiency and sustainability of party-state intervention	1) Flexibility and efficiency of coordinative institutions between various governmental agencies; 2) Sustainability of the governmental supports; 3) The readiness of the government to accept the uncertain outcomes of collaborative innovations;
	Integration between government and social sectors	1) Cooperative mechanisms between party state and extra-local actors; 2) Measures of party state to intervene community governance;
<b>Bonding</b> <b>(cadre - resident - community)</b>	Social inclusivity and cohesion	1) Community leadership and cadre-resident trust; 2) Social cohesion and conflicts; 3) Community participation and inclusion of decision-making process;
	Value-sharing of collective economy	1) Operation of collective economic organisation; 2) Distribution mechanisms of development benefits;
<b>Bridging</b> <b>(community - extra-local actors)</b>	Rural-urban linkages	1) Urban-to-rural flows (e.g., business partnership, reverse migration etc.); 2) New agricultural techniques, productivity, business models and household income level; 3) Spillover of knowledge and skills by extra-local actors;



		4) Cooperative and benefit-sharing mechanisms between extra-local actors and rural households;
--	--	--

Foreknowledge of such anticipated outcomes provided cues for further investigation in the interviews that were conducted as part of this study and enabled further understanding to be garnered with regard to how NED mechanics unfold and develop in different settings. Each dimension and element were meticulously chosen to help the author investigate how the socio-economic conditions of the study areas have been impacted by the MAZ. The following paragraphs explain why these analytical dimensions and elements were selected:

*(1) Linking relationship / networks*

The analysis of linking relationships / networks comprises four dimensions. Drawing on Bock's (2016) study which emphasizes the importance of redirecting financial and institutional resources from urban to rural areas to address rural marginalization, this research first identified two key dimensions: economic support and institutional support from the public sector.

Economic support examines the tangible support by the active party-state to rural development, and consists of two elements. The first is the priority given to rural development within the local development framework; particularly crucial in NED models driven by political mobilisation. The second is the investments and subsidies (including taxation reductions) provided by the public sector, and includes those from state-owned enterprises as well as other non-governmental party-state organisations in China. Based on the findings from the pilot studies, the scope of the public sector was extended beyond governmental departments to include party-state institutions, state-owned enterprises, LGFVs, universities and other state-funded research institutes, as well as official political consultative bodies (i.e., local CPPCC<sup>20</sup>), which can be mobilised by the party network.

---

<sup>20</sup> CPPCC stands for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. It is an important political advisory body in China. Its main functions include offering suggestions and proposals to the government, discussing major political, economic, and social

The second dimension, institutional support, also consists of two elements. The first includes regulations which support administration, finance, fiscal policies, and land allocation. The second involves mainstream resource support for infrastructure (i.e., electricity, road, tap water etc.), the living environment (i.e., soil, waterbody, biodiversity, landscape etc.) and public services (e.g., education, healthcare etc.). These two elements examine efforts made by the active party-state to transform the institutionalised urban-rural dualistic governance structure.

The third dimension is the flexibility, efficiency and sustainability of party-state intervention. As highlighted by Neumeier (2012), a successful collaborative innovation for networked rural development requires the government to be internally coordinated, so as to ensure sustainable interventions alongside appropriate exit strategies. Additionally, the government and the relevant evaluation system should be tolerant of the uncertainties brought about by community-based collaborative innovation. The existing social governance system in China, as discussed in Section 3.1, suffers from issues of fragmented governance and short-sighted objectives. Meanwhile, the PBG framework in which the NED is rooted incorporates several top-down evaluations, making these elements valuable for the NED as well.

The fourth dimension is the cooperation between government and social sectors. Within the framework of NED, party-state actors assume a central role in rural development while rural society is diversified. It follows, that it is imperative to explore whether and how local governments have established cooperative mechanisms with the new extra-local actors from the private sector. Moreover, as the NED aims to facilitate rural integration, it is necessary to scrutinize the interventions made by the party-state in community governance.

The third and fourth dimensions analyse whether/how NED can achieve a balance between the top-down attributes inherent in the PBG system attached to the active party-

---

issues, participating in the formulation and implementation of policies, and promoting national unity and harmony. While it does not have legislative power, its role is influential in shaping policy decisions and providing feedback to the government. The CPPCC operates in parallel with the CPC and the National People's Congress (China's top legislative body). Together, these three entities form the major pillars of China's political system.

state and the need for social involvement and innovation to foster a sustainable activated community in implementation stage.

## *(2) Bonding relationship / networks*

The analysis on bonding relationships / networks has two dimensions. The first focuses on social inclusivity and cohesion, which is the socio-institutional foundation by which rural residents benefit from rural development activities. It encompasses three analytical elements. The first examines community leadership and the trust between cadres and residents. Many existent studies have pointed out that strong community leadership plays a crucial role in promoting rural development and collaborative innovation (Kirk and Shutte, 2004; Ramie et al., 2016). Within the framework of the NED, village cadres play a leading role in community governance as intermediaries between the party state and the community. As highlighted by Richter and Christmann (2023), these intermediaries have emerged as key actors in driving networked rural development. In line with the administration of Xi, a fundamental emphasis has been placed on rebuilding party cadre leadership and discipline, especially for those cadres who had lost community trust (see Section 5.1). Community leadership and cadre-resident trust is highlighted in this research to see if and how the NED can rebuild the leadership and community governance capacity through creating activated communities in the rural areas.

The second analytical element is social cohesion and conflict. This refers to the level of unity and cohesion between community members. A community with strong social cohesion can better address challenges, form consensus, and collectively promote development. However, since the Open Reform in the 1980s, China's rural areas have experienced the phenomenon of community atomisation, in which community members remain relatively independent and lack effective cooperation and interaction. This has led to deficiencies in social cohesion (see Section 4.3). Changes of social conflicts (i.e., crime rate, disputes between villagers) after the implementation of the programme are also essential to analyse the impacts of NED on community building.

The third element is community participation and inclusion of decision-making process. Existing research on the NRRS has highlighted the paramount importance of active

engagement (i.e., high passion and participatory rate of village congress meeting) by rural communities in local decision-making processes and programme implementation. For instance, Wu and Liu (2021) emphasised that such participation plays a critical role in ensuring equitable distribution of benefits between rural households, and also enables state programmes to effectively address the specific needs of a (given) community.

The second dimension examines the mechanisms and outcomes of value distribution within the collective economy, specifically detailing the processes through which economic benefits are allocated among the members of the rural community. The pilot studies also underscored its significance in the context of NED practice. These bottom-up community economic entities, guided by village committees, assume a critical role in establishing economically sustainable and inclusive bonding relational networks, and through so doing enhancing communities' capacities to capture development benefits. Subsequently, the second analytical element pertains to the distribution mechanisms of development benefits; a matter widely emphasised in the MAZ and other NRRS policies. This research investigates whether rural communities, operating within the NED framework, can effectively establish and lead mechanisms for the equitable distribution of benefits with communities or whether it creates new exploiting elite groups.

### *(3) Bridging relationships / networks*

The analysis of bridging relational networks focuses on 'rural-urban linkages. Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of this dimension in reversing rural marginalization (see, for instance, Sirayi et al., 2021; Woods, 2009). Strengthening rural-urban connections is also a crucial task for the active party-state and activated community. The former is expected by the central government to address institutional barriers and market failures hindering rural-urban interactions, while the latter seeks to sustain interactions with extra-local actors introduced by the government, and ensures the successful implementation of external investments. This dimension examines whether and how the socio-economic dynamics generated from the rural restructuring process since the NSCC have been integrated by the party-state into NED framework.

The analysis on bridging relationships / networks comprises two elements which capture both tangible and intangible interactions between rural communities and external urban actors. The first element is 'urban-to-rural flows,' and focuses on urban-rural socio-economic interactions which mainly include private enterprises, rural returnees, and urban citizens. According to Wu and Liu (2021) and the pilot studies, such connectivity can manifest through new business partnerships, reverse migration, and extra-local investments within the context of the NRRS. The second element focuses on new agricultural techniques, productivity, new rural businesses (i.e., diversification of economic structure) and changes of household income level, which are the main expected outcomes of collaborative innovation between activated communities and the extra-local actors during the implementation process of MAZ.

The third element critically assesses the spillover of knowledge by analysing the influence of new technologies, investments, and ideas introduced by extra-local actors on the development visions and capabilities of rural households. It also investigates whether these impacts primarily benefit a privileged group of elites or are effectively disseminated among and accessible to ordinary people within the party-led governance. The fourth element centres on the establishment and sustainability of a durable mechanism for sharing interests between extra-local actors and communities. It evaluates the stability and fairness of the bridging relationships facilitated by party-state forces under the NED model, and determines whether these relationships can effectively provide equitable benefits for local residents. The establishment of new political and economic entities or partnerships that integrate both local communities and external actors is often identified as a key parameter, and follows critical theories in social innovation (e.g., Lema et al., 2018) and networked development (e.g., Bock, 2016).

## **6.5 Research method**

### *(1) Data collection and protection*

Guided by this analytical framework, and following the pilot study, the author conducted four rounds of fieldwork in the three case study villages between April and December 2022. The investigation approach primarily consisted of one-to-one in-depth semi-

structured interviews (the average length of individual interviews was over one hour), focus groups<sup>21</sup>, and on-site observations. However, due to the pandemic lockdown which severely limited mobility, the author also resorted to online social media, primarily WeChat, and phone calls to collect unpublished official data and policy documents<sup>22</sup>. Additionally, these online channels were used to verify and supplement information from the interviewees, and helped to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data.

The first round of data collection took place in Lanjing Village in April 2022 and lasted for ten days. The author conducted interviews with eight stakeholders in Lanjing Village and Bamboo MAZ. This number comprised: two governmental officials who were responsible for the management of the MAZ and local agricultural and rural development, a representative from the Varnova Group (the largest bamboo industry enterprise within the zone), and five villagers. Among the villagers interviewed, two were the village secretary and the manager of the village collective economic enterprise.

The second round of data collection was conducted in Qianjiachi Village in April 2022, and lasted for seven days. The author conducted interviews with eight stakeholders related to Orange MAZ and Qianjiachi Village in total. Given that the development of both the MAZ and the striving village involved support from various government departments, not only the MAZ Management Committee and the County Agriculture Bureau but also the Town Government and the Organisational Department of County Party Committee (in charge of party-building work) played crucial roles in promoting community participation. As a result, the author interviewed four officials from different levels and departments to gain diverse perspectives. In addition, the author also interviewed the largest external

---

<sup>21</sup> Due to political sensitivity, the officials requested that interviews with villagers and village cadres be conducted in their presence. Considering the relatively conservative culture of Chinese rural society, the author agreed to this request and conducted the investigation in the form of focus groups. This allowed the use of official endorsement (i.e., presence of officials) to gain trust from the community members and facilitate the research process. Fortunately, during the research, there were no apparent instances of officials interfering with the expression of opinions by community residents. Also, to ensure the authenticity of the information obtained in this context, the data from the focus groups were triangulated through third-party sources and privately verified with residents through phone calls and online social media.

<sup>22</sup> These non-interview data, being unpublished, are often not readily accessible to the public, but essential for evidence-based research. The use of such data adds to the depth and comprehensiveness of the study. These documents have been formally cited by the thesis.

agricultural contractor in the village, who operates the Tianqiushengzhi Fruit Company. Four villagers were also interviewed through focus groups; their comments provided valuable group dynamics and perspectives. Among them were the village secretary and the manager of the village's orange cooperative. These two persons were also interviewed individually via one-to-one in-depth interviews. The combination of focus group and individual interviews allowed for a comprehensive understanding to be garnered of the viewpoints and experiences of key stakeholders within the village community.

During the pilot study, the author discovered that the LGFVs that were established by the county government provided crucial financial support for the implementation of the NED model. However, due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic and political sensitivity (i.e., regarding the use of public finance and debt crisis), direct interviews with LGFV managers were not possible in the two cases in Sichuan. The author addressed this gap by conducting in-depth interviews with the Deputy Director of the County Agriculture Bureau, who was frequently involved in collaborations with the relevant LGFVs. Through these interviews, the author gained sufficient insights into the roles of LGFVs in the operation of the NED and other rural development affairs.

The third round of fieldwork was initially planned for April year in Yangmatang Village, Jiangsu Province. However, due to China's widespread zero-COVID lockdown policies the fieldwork did not take place until August year when inter-city transport was again permitted. The author spent seven days living in the Caoqiuhezhu Hotel inside the village to conduct the fieldwork. Ten stakeholders were interviewed. From the public sector, interviewees included officials from Fruit MAZ, the manager of Caoqiu Tourism Development Company (a local LGFV for tourism and rural development), and relevant county departments. Additionally, three villagers (including the village secretary) and two representatives from local main enterprises (i.e., tourism accommodation and the floriculture industry) were interviewed through focus groups. Furthermore, and to ensure the depth of information and enable triangulation of the interview data, one-to-one in-depth interviews were conducted separately with the village secretary and the two enterprise representatives.

In the course of the investigations undertaken across the three villages, formal interviews, conducted in the format of focus groups, only encompassed a limited number of villagers due to the requirements imposed by the local governments, and the selection of these villagers was primarily determined by the government. To address this issue, the author resided in the nearby town centre (in Sichuan) or directly inside the village (in Jiangsu) during the research periods, so that he could conduct expedient unstructured interviews (about 30 minutes) with villagers who were encountered casually during his investigative activities. These research activities were conducted 8 times in Lanjing village, 4 times in Qianjiachi village, and 9 times in Yangmatang village, all in an effort to deepen understanding of the impacts of MAZ on rural households. Including these interviewees, the total number of interview subjects was 49, including core actors from public, community, and private sectors (Table 6.9). The interview topics are listed in Table 6.10 (for interview questions, please refer to the Appendix C). In the case studies presented in Chapters Six to Eight, any data or information sourced from interviews is indicated at the end of the sentence, with the interviewee's reference number provided in parentheses, for instance, "[...] (R1)" or in some cases. "...(R1) stated, [...]".

Table 6.9 Interview subjects

Case study	Interviewees from government	Interviewees from community	Interviewees from extra-local private sector
<b>Bamboo MAZ in County Qianfen, Sichuan (Binding village)</b>	R1: Director of MAZ Management Committee; R2: Deputy director of county bureau of agriculture	R3: Village party secretary of Lanjing; R4: Manager of village tourism management Company; R5-R15: Lanjing villagers R16: Founder of Chun Yufang Bamboo Art Workshop	R17: Vice general manager of Varnova Bamboo Paper Company
<b>Orange MAZ in County Qianfen, Sichuan (Striving village)</b>	R18: Director of MAZ Management Committee; R2: Deputy director of county agricultural bureau;	R21: Village party secretary of Qianjiachi; R22: Manager of orange cooperative	R29: Manager of Tianqiushengzhi Fruit Enterprise;



	R19: Mayor of Ditai Town; R20: Deputy head of county organisation department	R23-R28: villagers of Qianjiachi;	
<b>Fruit MAZ in County Lianyin, Jiangsu (Receiving village)</b>	R30: Director of MAZ/resort zone Management Committee; R31: Chief planner of MAZ Management Committee; R32: Director of county bureau of agriculture; R33: Deputy director of county construction bureau; R34: Vice general manager of Caoqiu Tourism Development Company;	R35: Village party secretary of Shengxiang; R36-R47: Yangmatang villagers	R48: Director of Fangzhisen Ecological Park; R49: Manager of Caoqiuhuazhu Restaurant

Table 6.10 Interview topics

	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Linking (local party-state bureaucrats)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- History, performance and strategy of MAZ;</li> <li>- Information and impacts arising from public investment;</li> <li>- Institutional support and innovation, and directed mainstream resources;</li> <li>- Governmental achievements and visions about MAZ;</li> <li>- Arrangement of control rights in MAZ practice and its change;</li> <li>- Cooperation between local/grassroots departments;</li> <li>- Future MAZ plans, and preparedness for future uncertainty;</li> <li>- Governmental technocratic measures and innovation;</li> <li>- Public participatory approaches and innovation;</li> <li>- Community-building projects;</li> <li>- Cadre-official and state-resident relationships;</li> </ul>
<b>Bonding (village cadres and residents)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cadre-resident relationships;</li> <li>- MAZ promotion strategies and visions of cadre and residents;</li> <li>- Participatory approaches;</li> <li>- Social conflicts and tensions;</li> </ul>

---

**Bridging  
(enterprise)**

- Betterment of community and way of life;
  - Collective asset and sharing mechanisms;
- 
- Vision of MAZ and future action plan;
  - Business model, value chain, added-value and connection with urban market;
  - Cooperation with other extra-local actors and challenges;
  - Training for local residents;
  - Job creation;
  - Cross-sectoral integration of business;
- 

Despite the potential for bias in this non-random sampling approach, the author posits that the interviewee sample was representative of Chinese rural demographics, with middle-aged people serving as the main workforce in the village, fewer returning or newly arrived young people, and a considerable number of older individuals (a finding that resonates with He, 2015). Furthermore, the author endeavoured to mitigate typical problems encountered in qualitative research during the study design process. In order to reduce observer bias, no research hypotheses were pre-established. Additionally, and to minimise the impact of social desirability bias and the Hawthorne Effect, the author endeavoured to establish trust with local officials as quickly as possible during private dinner meetings (a context that, in Chinese culture, is regarded as highly relaxed and trustworthy) that were conducted during the pilot studies. This resulted in the collection of substantial information that has been deemed to be both genuine and valuable. However, this information was not digitally recorded, but noted and transcribed by the author. As Rutakumwa et al., (2019) have suggested, this kind of interview script can mitigate potential vulnerability and increase the credibility of data. The insights gleaned from these discussions were used to optimise the questions for the formal interviews, but were not incorporated into the final thesis. The author also independently corroborated key pieces of information (e.g., critical incidents during the development process) with interview subjects other than the officials, through private means including WeChat and telephone. Finally, all information gathered from the interviews was triangulated with document analysis of secondary data such as official media reports, governmental statistical data,

reports and documents, and public database of enterprises (i.e., qcc.com), to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the data.

The research (project number: 21565/001) was granted ethical approval and successfully underwent risk assessment by University College London. All formal interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed by the author. In alignment with the stipulations of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, the transcriptions and all secondary data were stored in a secure folder on the author's laptop and additionally uploaded to the author's Google Drive. Both of these storage mediums are password-protected and can only be accessed by the author. The results obtained from these interviews did and will remain strictly confidential and were anonymously circulated within the research team, which consisted of the author and his supervisors. These results will only be disseminated or published within the context of the author's PhD thesis and any subsequent academic publications. In all these publications, the participants' contributions will remain unidentifiable so as to ensure anonymity and uphold the highest standards of research ethics. In the images referenced within this thesis, all identifiable names and textual marks related to local places have been redacted. All presented names — whether of individuals, places, or companies — are pseudonyms.

## *(2) Data analysis and presentation*

The empirical data collected for this study was processed and analysed using the narrative method and triangulated with document analysis. The relation-based analytical framework (Table 6.4) supported the author in conducting interviews (for interview topics, see Table 6.10) with core stakeholders and enabled the construction of analytical narratives from different perspectives which were used to identify the phases within the NED practice.

Narrative analysis is a common method employed for the analysis and presentation of qualitative data. It involves situating events within a meaningful story to provide an explanatory context. The narrative approach is especially prevalent in studies focused on rural social / collaborative innovation, because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the sequential development and complex interconnectedness of events (Nordberg et al.,

2020). From existing research, it can be observed that narrative analysis, due to its aim to encompass and reflect the complexity of the research object, does not have a universally applicable structure (Rogelia et al., 2003). However, a 'plot' is a consistent and essential element among studies that use this approach.

A plot refers to how a series of events, which might initially appear random or disconnected, are made to appear related and significant within a narrative. In other words, it refers to a storyline, the structure and sequence of critical incidents that shape the story being told. This thesis incorporates Neumeier's (2012) framework of the social innovation process, which defines stages including problematisation, expression of interest, and delineation and coordination as the plot, for the constructed narratives (for details, see Section 2.1). The decision to utilise this particular framework was made based on three foundational arguments:

- 1) The nature of NED as a collaborative innovation: As elucidated in Section 5.2, the policy framework of NED, mirroring other forms of networked developments, fundamentally revolves around a drive to initiate and augment collaborative innovation. This conception harmonises with prevailing theories on social innovation, and bridges the concept of NED with mainstream rural networked development theories. However, obviously, inherent disparities in the social governance structures of Chinese and Western societies presage divergent practical logics in the practice;
- 2) Convergence with existing research: Neumeier's schematic of social innovation presents high symmetry with other research frameworks extant in scholarly discourse (see, for instance, Vercher 2020);
- 3) Chronological features of the framework: Neumeier's framework distinctively underscores the temporal progression of events, a trait that dovetails with the fundamental attributes of narrative analysis. This alignment is especially salient as most pertinent studies have resorted to techniques such as event sequence analysis and learning history method (Nordberg et al., 2020; Rogelia et al., 2003). The objective of such methodologies is to elucidate and depict the intricate relationships cultivated by actor networks throughout the course of NED practice.

The research initially utilised the auto-transcription feature of iFlytek's voice recorder to transcribe the interviews. Subsequently, the author rectified numerous errors which stemmed from dialectal variations. The final transcript is in Chinese, and any direct quotations in the case studies that follow were translated by the author. The author then processed the interview data, and thence dissected and restructured it according to the plot. Through this process, critical incidents were pinpointed; quintessential actions within the actor network that exerted a transformative impact on the collaborative innovation process. These can be seen to have been pivotal junctures or inception points of the development process of the villages.

Given that the village typologies (binding, striving, and receiving) were coined prior to the enactment of the MAZ policy, and recognising that the NED model, as represented by the NRRS, amalgamates various multi-scale policies before and beyond the scope of just MAZ, this research embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the prolonged historical trajectory of community development. This study scrutinised the interplay between MAZ and other concurrent NRRS initiatives, diverging from a narrow focus on socio-economic fluctuations before and after the MAZ project's deployment.

The narratives for the three case studies concisely summarised in Table 6.11. Subsequent chapters provide an in-depth exploration of each case, with each chapter dedicated to one of the individual case studies.

Table 6.11 Narratives of MAZ programmes as NED collaborative innovation (Source: author's own)

---

<b>Lanjing Village (binding village)</b>	
Plot/storyline	Lanjing Village, with its longstanding tradition of bamboo weaving and an initial dependency on business investments, experienced a resurgence in socio-economic vitality. This rejuvenation, which facilitated the village's active participation in NRRS, can be attributed to substantial governmental investments directed towards the establishment of the Bamboo MAZ.
Narrative	<b>Problematization</b>

---

---

Critical incident 1: Village and county being designated with award from central government

In 1993, local bamboo art master Chun Yufang personally financed the construction of an enterprise park named China Bamboo Art City for local bamboo workshops and enterprises. Consequently, Lanjing Village received accolades from a central government department, earning the moniker “China’s No.1 Village for Bamboo Art”. This distinction also led Qianfen County to be recognized as the “Chinese Town of Bamboo Art” by the central authorities in 2000;

Critical incident 2: Visit of provincial party secretary and establishment of Bamboo MAZ

In 2010, the provincial party secretary paid a visit to Qianfen and was impressed by the potential of the local bamboo industry. This led to his endorsement of establishing an MAZ dedicated to the bamboo sector. Bolstered by this political momentum, the county government founded the zone in 2011. The initiative culminated in its designation as a national-level MAZ by the central authority in 2018. Lanjing is the core development area of the MAZ, receiving massive state investments;

#### **Expression of interest**

Critical incident 3: Establishment of village collective tourism management company

In 2019, the newly-elected village secretary initiated a crowd-funding campaign within the village to establish a tourism management company. This company was tasked with taking on the government’s labour contracts and outsourced construction projects;

#### **Delineation and coordination**

Critical incident 4: Establishment of new community self-governance organisations

From 2019, the village committee recognised the rising engagement of villagers in political matters and the influx of extra-local entrepreneurs. To cater for this shift, they founded non-statutory self-governance bodies, including the New Rural Elite Democratic Forum and the Villagers’ Forum, to foster a more participatory decision-making environment. Simultaneously, and with a view to promoting the bamboo industry within the village, economic associations such as the Bamboo Weaving Art Heritage Team and the Entrepreneurship Incubation Team were established to underpin local entrepreneurship.

Plot/storyline After the top-down party-building discipline campaign, a new village secretary of Qianjiachi led the community in reclaiming barren hills to develop the Ponkan orange industry. This not only rebuilt community cohesion and reestablished urban-rural economic ties but also indirectly spurred the proposal of the Orange MAZ policy. After being selected as a “Liaison Village” by the Executive Office of CLGRW, the development of Qianjiachi accelerated even further. A stable cooperation with the local public authorities and MAZ was established, enhancing the village’s resilience to market shocks and policy changes.

Narrative **Problematisation**

Critical incident 1: Restructuring of community leadership and initiation of reclaiming project

In 2013, the corrupt village secretary of Qianjiachi was arrested and replaced by a capable rural returnee. The village secretary led the villagers in reclaiming the forests that were covered by highly-polluted eucalyptus trees. They undertook soil restoration and planted ponkan oranges. Through this process, trust between village officials and villagers was rebuilt, leadership was strengthened, and community cohesion was restored, laying a solid social foundation for future development.

Critical incident 2: Establishment of Orange cooperative and proposal of Orange MAZ

At the end of 2013, the village committee founded the Orange Cooperative, a rural collective economic organisation, with the objective of enhancing orange quality and bolstering urban-rural economic ties. Additionally, the village secretary's proposal to develop the orange industry paved the way for the establishment of the Pokan Zone policy.

**Expression of interest**

Critical incident 3: Establishment and progression of Orange MAZ

In 2015, the county government formally established the Pokan Zone to accelerate the development of the local citrus industry. This zone was later rebranded as the Orange MAZ in 2019. The MAZ undertook significant investments in the village, enhancing both its agricultural and transportation infrastructures. These initiatives aligned closely with Qianjiachi's developmental vision, thereby effectively promoting the local socio-economic development.

Critical incident 4: Designation as the Liaison Village of the central authority

In 2019, Qianjiachi Village's accomplishments garnered the attention of higher-ranking officials. Due to their advocacy, the village was unexpectedly designated as the "Liaison Village" of the CLGRW. Keen to demonstrate their diligent execution of the NRRS, the county government embarked on substantial investments to enhance the village's infrastructure and living conditions. This initiative also cemented a trust-based relationship between local authorities and the village's leadership. In the ensuing period, the village consistently secured a myriad of honours and associated programme funds from the government.

### **Delineation and coordination**

#### **Critical incident 5: Expansion of party organisations and services**

Starting in 2019, and under the impetus of the MAZ party committee and the town party committee, the locality progressively established a network of party organisations embedded within rural communities, agri-enterprises, and other non-governmental entities. This establishment cemented the leadership of the party in local industrial development and rural governance and created a party-led governance network in both economy and society.

#### **Critical incident 6: Bottom-up land entrustment reform**

In 2020, and facing a plummeting orange market due to an oversupply, the village secretary initiated a land entrustment reform to encourage farmers to entrust the management right of their orchards to the Orange Cooperative. By centralising the management, the Cooperative could ensure consistent quality and technological advancements throughout the entire production process and reduce production costs; thereby enhancing market competitiveness. With the backing of both county and town-level officials, the village secretary successfully raised funds and launched the initial pilot of the reform, thereby establishing a more inclusive profit-sharing mechanism within the community.

#### **Critical incident 7: Adaptive strategy to MAZ policy shift by government-village coalition**

In 2022, the central government shifted its MAZ policy focus from economic crops to staple food crops in response to a food crisis. As a result, parts of the orchards in Qianjiachi Village faced the threat of being reclaimed for arable farming. The local government and the village committee established an effective collaboration mechanism. They introduced a new co-planting technology for soybeans and orange



trees and designated the village as a pilot area for this technology, thereby helping the village navigate the challenges brought about by the policy shift.

---

### **Yangmatang Village (receiving village)**

**Plot/storyline** Yangmatang Village, located at the core development zone of the Fruit MAZ, had consistently lagged in development despite the elevation in administrative levels of both the MAZ and the town in which the village is situated. It was not until the distinctive migrant culture of Yangmatang caught the county government's eye, leading them to designate Yangmatang as the candidate of "Characteristic Countryside", a flagship project spearheaded by the provincial party secretary - that it began to witness intensive investments from both the government and private enterprises. Gradually, the village emerged as a local model project under the NRRS initiative.

**Narrative** **Problematisation**

Critical incident 1: From prefectural-level MAZ to provincial-level Resort Zone

In 2009, the county government finalized the plan for a county-level Fruit MAZ, with Yangmatang Village being included as a core area. In 2011, it was upgraded to a prefectural-level MAZ. However, due to the lack of targeted government funding, its development largely relied on private agricultural enterprise investment. By 2014, the county government invested this MAZ to transformed it into a resort zone in order to apply for a new provincial-level resort programme. Subsequently, in 2016, the town government where the resort was located was upgraded to a Provincial-level Economic Development Zone. These administrative promotions significantly strengthened local fiscal power, and turned the rural area where Yangmatang is located into a Receiving Village.

Critical incident 2: Designation as the candidate of the "Characteristic Countryside"

In 2017, the village was selected as a candidate for Characteristic Countryside, a flagship NRRS programme championed by the provincial party secretary. To advocate for this programme, a multi-scalar mobilization system was put into action. As a result, a vast array of institutional and fiscal resources was funnelled towards the village. At the village level, a state-owned village development company were established to bankroll community development initiatives, in which village secretaries played as board member.

**Expression of interest**

#### Critical incident 3: Development of Caoqiuhuazhu Hotel

Under the government's investment attraction policies, Caoqiuhuazhu Company turned some rural homesteads into hotels with the assistance of the government. Caoqiuhuazhu helped the village establish an industrial chain centered around sweet potato, attracting a large number of tourists.

#### **Delineation and coordination**

#### Critical incident 4: Withdrawal of village development corporation

After being designated as a "characteristic countryside", the leadership of the village development company was transferred to the MAZ Management Committee. Village cadres were also removed from the management positions within the company. In exchange, the vast majority of the everyday operational and maintenance costs of Yangmatang were borne by the town government and the MAZ Management Committee.

---

In general, this chapter addresses the methodological approaches that were used in this research. The MAZ policy was chosen as the subject of investigation. Grounded in prior analysis of Chinese rural typologies, three study areas were identified. Following this, an analytical framework anchored in the concepts of linking, bonding, and bridging relationships was constructed by the author. Empirical data collection encompassed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, while secondary data comprised media reports, official statistics, and governmental documents. All collected data were subsequently examined using narrative analysis.

The subsequent three address the findings derived from the narrative analysis. Adhering to the plot, each case study is expounded following a sequence which encompasses problematisation, expression of interest, and finally, delineation and coordination — these being the main steps of collaborative innovation. This structured enables the practical mechanisms and dynamics underpinning NED and concurrently to be highlighted as well as parallels between this nascent Chinese networked development paradigm and its global counterparts.

## Chapter Seven: Bamboo MAZ and Lanjing Village

Lanjing Village, with its longstanding tradition of bamboo weaving and an initial dependency on business investments, experienced a resurgence in socio-economic vitality. This revitalisation, which facilitated the village's active participation in NRRS, can be attributed to the substantial governmental investments which were directed towards the establishment of the Bamboo MAZ.

This case study elucidates the process by which a local Chinese government was transformed into an active party-state dedicated to rural development, as well as how a binding village evolved into an activated community under the auspices of the MAZ project. Owing to its clear and concise structure, this case is positioned as the first among the three case studies. Serving as an archetype, it facilitates comparisons with the subsequent cases.

### 7.1 Problematisation

*Critical incident 1: Village and county were designated with an award from central government*

Qianfen County has a 3,000-year-old history of bamboo handicrafts - such as bamboo matting and Chinese fans - and more than 30,000 people worked in this industry during the 1960s and 1970s. Lanjing Village is a typical binding village in the mountainous area of western China, with highly fragmented and limited farmland resources. It had a long history of bamboo weaving. According to the village party secretary (R3), "(before the Open Reform), every household knew how to weave bamboo and thin bamboo baskets". During the rapid industrialization and urbanization since the 1980s, the local government prioritized manufacturing industries, and as a result, the traditional art of bamboo weaving was sidelined, leading to its marginalisation (R16).

Before the Bamboo MAZ, the local bamboo industry and the community development of Lanjing primarily relied on private investments, which predominantly originated from two sources. The first private investment in the bamboo industry of Lanjing was spearheaded

by Chun Yufang (R16), a distinguished bamboo weaving artisan who lived within the community. In the 1970s, he led villagers to craft intricate bamboo items such as fruit trays for a foreign order, and subsequently traded the proceeds for three walk-behind tractors. He recognized the vast economic potential of bamboo art industry, noting that “while a truckload of bamboo might only be worth a few thousand yuan as raw material, its value can multiply tenfold when made into furniture or art crafts [...] it needs to integrate itself with the market to ensure generational preservation of this ancestral traditions” (R16). In 1993, Chun self-funded and established the China Bamboo Art City in Lanjing Village (Figure 7.1), a small enterprise zone with an exhibition hall for informal local bamboo workshops. This facilitated the transition of local bamboo products from mediocre commodities to art crafts.



Figure 7.1 China Bamboo Art City established by Chun Yufang (source: Author’s own)

Second, according to the deputy director of the county Agriculture Bureau (R2), the Sino-Japan Greening Communication Fund (Obuchi Fund) donated about 4 million yuan to plant bamboos in the rural regions where Lanjing is located. This was followed by a 12-million-yuan investment from the Sichuan Varnova Group to construct a 2,000-hectare production base, which facilitated the area’s transition to greener bamboo paper products. According to a report from the Qianfen County Government (2019), this production base provided 75,000 tons of raw material. In return, the company built a 60-kilometer road and 28 water reservoirs for this mountainous rural area.

These entrepreneurial endeavours earned the village the designation of “China’s No.1 Village of Bamboo Art” from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration. Leveraging this honour, the county government successfully acquired, in 2000, the title of "Chinese Town of Bamboo Art" from the Ministry of Culture. By 2008, the local bamboo art was recognized as a “National-level Intangible Heritage”, and became a significant cultural asset to stimulate the MAZ development.

However, despite these private investments, the bamboo industry was not historically a key component of the local economic development strategy because of its relatively modest economic contribution to the county’s economy.

#### *Critical incident 2: Visit of provincial party secretary and establishment of Bamboo MAZ*

The catalyst for the problematisation of Lanjing Village's development and its bamboo industry occurred in 2010. The provincial party secretary promoted the idea of developing the potential of the local bamboo culture. According to the director of Bamboo MAZ Management Committee (R1), the provincial party secretary was impressed by the village-enterprise partnership and local bamboo art history, and he thus endorsed the creation of a bamboo agricultural zone.

Triggered by this newfound political impetus, a “Leading Group on Bamboo Economy Development”, co-chaired by the county party secretary and the mayor, was established by the county government in 2011. This was the first component of the active party-state. In 2012, a comprehensive plan for the MAZ was given the green light, and a Bamboo MAZ Management Committee was established as the key actor of the active party-state network to supervise the development of the MAZ and the bamboo industry of the county. This “Leading Group” upscaled the MAZ programme from a departmental task of the Qianfen Bureau of Agriculture to a top-priority political task for all local officials in Qianfen County. This “Leading Group” comprised representatives from 38 party and state departments within the county government, with each being relevant to the establishment of the MAZ and corresponding administrative protocols. Responsibilities, tasks, and

timelines of each department were clearly defined, with monthly progress reviews (R1). This integration was strategically orchestrated to harness and consolidate both party and state bureaucratic resources at the county level, and facilitated the comprehensive advancement of the infrastructure and environment within the MAZ (R1).

Additionally, the Bamboo MAZ Management Committee was endowed with an extraordinary administrative status. This further increased the political significance of the development of the MAZ and the bamboo industry. The Management Committee has been established as a town/section-level specialised agency with more than 20 official civil servants and an independent budget of around 10 million yuan per annum (Bamboo MAZ Management Committee, 2022b). Meanwhile, according to the R2, the executive officer of the “Leading Group” was the director of the MAZ Management committee, and was also a party group member (i.e., de facto steering group) of the Bureau of Forestry and the Bureau of Natural Resource, which have responsibility for spatial planning and land management. As suggested by R1, this centralized personnel structure has enabled the MAZ “to leverage the energy of the ‘Leading Group’”, and by extension, the county party-state leaders backing them, to effectively address and mitigate the fragmented *tiao-kuai* governance issues commonly observed in Chinese social governance system (for details, see Section 3.1).

Furthermore, in the 2018 national departmental reshuffle (for details, see Section 5.1 and Appendix A), the Bureau of Forestry was originally slated to merge into the Bureau of Natural Resources. However, the local county government decided to retain the Bureau of Forestry, recognising it as the supervisory body for the bamboo economy. This decision was made to ensure dedicated institutional support for the bamboo industry (R2).

Beyond the internal power restructuring within the party-state apparatus, the county government undertook spatial rescaling initiatives in its planning framework to enhance the MAZ’s privilege over spatial development. A high-ranking official affiliated with R1, who had previously overseen the planning of the MAZ, disclosed that the county government engaged eminent research and plan-making and research institutes including Tsinghua University and Tongji University to devise tailored development plans

for local bamboo economy and the MAZ. According to him, “(the new plans endorsed by these leading institutes) enabled the county government to bargain with higher level authorities for more construction land quotas and revision for statutory ‘County Comprehensive Plan’ and ‘County Land Use Plan’”. As a result, Lanjing Village was offered an extra construction land quota of 13.66 hectare for MAZ development (R1).

As the core of the active party-state, the “Leading Group” also exerted both regulatory and financial tools to facilitate development, based on the PBG framework. In terms of regulatory instruments, a strict performance evaluation and accountability system was created to extend the ‘whips of county leaders’ to those marginal party-state actors such as low-ranked grassroots officials and village cadres. According to the village party secretary of Lanjing (R3), village cadres whose performance fails to meet designated standards receive verbal warnings or are even subject to political inquiry by the county government.

In terms of financial support, the “Leading Group” established the Bamboo Investment and Development Corporation, a state-owned LGFV. This entity is mandated to manage financial investments, supervise infrastructural developments, and provide consultancy services pertinent to the bamboo economy for the MAZ. The managers within the company are experienced civil servants who have long-term experience in the local bamboo sector, and they are co-located in an office in the MAZ Management Committee suite to ensure active communication and coordination with MAZ officials (R2). Moreover, in the name of the county government, a 27-million yuan “Rural Revitalisation Incentive Fund” was established by the Bamboo Investment and Development Corporation to subsidise those town-level authorities which are outstanding in terms of their development of the bamboo industry.

According to Bamboo MAZ Management Committee (2022a), the total public investment to the zone had been over 4.1 billion yuan by 2021, and several major construction projects funded by the local government had been implemented (Table 7.1 and Figure 7.2). The majority of investments were made after the initiation of the NRRS, and particularly after Xi Jinping’s visit to Sichuan in 2018, when he emphasised the

importance of the bamboo industry for territorial development. To date the infrastructure within the rural areas of the MAZ has witnessed significant enhancement, with 100% coverage for electricity, water, and 4G internet connection (Bamboo MAZ Management Committee, 2022a).

Table 7.1 Major public investment projects of MAZ in Lanjing Village

Name of the project	Time period	Amount of investment
Bamboo Wetland Park	2014	50 million yuan
Panda Hall	2016	5.2 million yuan
International Bamboo Art Exhibition Hall	2016	21.9 million yuan
International Bamboo Economy Exhibition Centre	2019	200 million yuan
International Bamboo Art Centre	2019	91.2 million yuan
Bamboo Courtyard Boutique Hotel	2020	168 million yuan
Bamboo Alley Village Regeneration Project	2020	4 million yuan
County Integrated Bamboo Cultural Tourism Demonstrative Project	2021-2022	450 million yuan



Figure 7.2 International Bamboo Art Exhibition Hall (source: Author’s own)

In addition to mobilizing the party-state system and redirecting the local development agenda towards the rural bamboo industry, the active party-state played a pivotal role in forging bridging relationships to underpin the rural development. The MAZ Management Committee has established long-term strategic partnerships with internationally- and nationally-operating extra-local actors in the business, fashion, and research sectors such as the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBR), the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Light Industrial Products and Arts-Crafts, and Beijing Design Week Commission, to improve and expand the added-value and market of local



bamboo products and associated tourism activities (R1) (Figure 7.3). Local bamboo art enterprises in Lanjing, such as Chun Yufang's studio, received special funding from the China International Development Cooperation Agency due to these surging bridging relationships. As long-term partners, the Chun Yufang Studio has cooperated with INBR on multiple occasions to conduct training workshops, cumulatively training over 2,000 participants (R16) (Figure 6.3).



Figure 7.3 INBR training workshop on bamboo weaving (source: Qianfen Government, 2022)

The MAZ Management Committee has also expanded the market for local bamboo products through establishing a sectoral e-business platform that spans state media and social media such as TikTok and Taobao (R1). In addition, according to R2, a core official of the Bureau of Forestry has been appointed to the board of the Varnova Group; a long-term investor in the MAZ (R2). The official acted as a liaison to link the county government, the Bureau of Forestry, the MAZ, and the company (R2). According to the vice general manager of Varnova (R17), in 2020, in light of achieving a new construction land quota, Varnova started to build a bio-finery factory in the zone, which was expected to create 4,000 jobs, 4-billion yuan of revenue, and 500-million yuan of tax income.

## 7.2 Expressions of interest

### *Critical incident 3: Establishment of village collective tourism management company*

These public investments (linking relationships) and cooperations with extra-local actors (bridging relationships) have attracted several young individuals to return to Lanjing.

According to R3, these young returnees (mostly graduates with an average age of 37 years) gradually displaced the previously aged leadership of the village committee (mostly people over 50 years old). R3, the current party secretary (also director of the village committee) of Lanjing was once a senior salesman for an urban-based shoe manufacturer. When he returned to Lanjing in 2018, and before being elected as the party secretary, he discerned the potential of harnessing the external investments attracted by the MAZ for bolstering the tourism sector. Reflecting on the situation, he commented: "At that time, when I had just returned, it felt like Lanjing was holding a golden bowl yet begging for food [...] Fundamentally, the village lacked cohesion and failed to effectively leverage its local tourism resources, resulting in minimal economic benefits" (R3).

A year after his ascendancy in 2019, the new village party secretary took the initiative to establish the Lanjing Tourism Management Company which, as a collective economic organisation, would seek to retain and amplify tourist revenue, and sparked a reconsideration of Lanjing Village's development approach. When asked why he did not opt for a cooperative (which is more common in developing rural collective economies), he responded:

"At that time, we undertook thorough research regarding the type of company structure. We discerned that cooperative had significant limitations, whereas a joint-stock company was more adaptive to market competition. [...] Compared to the more 'village-centric' cooperatives, joint-stock companies garnered greater trust in the market [...] Cooperatives sounded somewhat outdated, and typically, every villager would have a stake regardless of their investment amount, resulting in a lack of a performance-based incentive structure" (R3).

While the proposal initially met with hesitation from the villagers, the village director managed to garner support and financial backing from fellow village party members. Subsequently, a number of returnees — primarily those who had engaged in business ventures outside of Lanjing Village — opted to contribute.

Through focus group discussions with the villagers led by the village secretary, the study delved into the company's equity structure. Within the company's equity composition, the village committee furnished the village's collective assets in land and infrastructure,

securing a 51% stake. The balance (49%), was formed through the monetary contributions of 14 rural returnees. Of this collective 51% stake, a designated 4% was set aside for 50 households that were officially recognized as being underprivileged by the county government. As for the profit distribution schema, 10% of the earnings were allocated for the remuneration of managers of the company, (largely comprised of members from the village committee); an additional 10% was held as a contingency reserve; and the residual profits were equitably disbursed among all village residents and distinct shareholders. The remaining funds were earmarked for everyday operations of the village and the maintenance of infrastructure.

Following the establishment of the profit-sharing structure, the village committee endeavoured to gain support from the MAZ. The initial form of support manifested as a cleaning service contract, which engaged 10 of Lanjing's most impoverished residents and an additional 80 villagers in the maintenance of the facilities enumerated in Table 7.1. As per the records from the MAZ, this contract facilitated a surge in the collective revenue of the village, elevating it from 7,200 to 116,000 yuan (Bamboo MAZ Management Committee, 2022a). As the village party secretary (R3) said:

“(The cleaning service) is the first business we took on. Previously, outsourcing it (to extra-local enterprise) would cost (the government) around 150,000 yuan per year, with the money going to outsiders. Now, we handle it with reduced operational costs, only needing about 110,000 yuan annually. This not only saves nearly 40,000 yuan, but the money also goes directly into the pockets of our villagers [...] The increase in income has greatly bolstered the villagers' confidence in the growth of our company” (R3).

The increased revenue also bolstered bonding relationships, which, in turn, enhanced the trust between the cadre and residents, as well as reinforcing community cohesion in advancing both rural tourism and the bamboo economy. Through interviews with local residents (R5-15), it became evident that their recognition of the significance of the bamboo sector. As stated by R5, an interviewee in the focus group who had taken on the contract for garbage collection in the village, “My current monthly income has exceeded 1,600 yuan. Before, I only made around four to five thousand a year. Such an income was something I couldn't even dare to dream of in the past. Now, I have a steady income working right at my doorstep. I am very happy and content”. In the following short

individual interviews with villagers, they also expressed joy at the increase in their incomes. However, despite the village cadre's claims that they frequently explained the MAZ policy and other NRRS policies to the villagers, the vast majority were still unaware of the existence and purpose of the MAZ and other NRRS policies. They only knew that the government had invested money and built facilities from which they could profit. Consequently, it can be argued that despite the growing investment by the party-state, under the clientelist governance culture, the majority of villagers' direct connection to government still largely relies on their patrons, namely the village cadres. As some residents mentioned:

“(My primary concern) is to clarify the subsidies and incentives [...] on agriculture, such as seeds and agricultural machines. For other matters, it's best left to the village cadres and officials; to be honest, we wouldn't be able to handle it anyway”, (R6, a major contractor of farmland in Lanjing, the quote is from a private interview with him after focus group).

“I don't really understand the government policies; they're difficult to grasp [...] Life has greatly improved from before. I hope that in the future, healthcare and insurance issues will be addressed”, (R9).

“They (village cadres) post policies in the WeChat group, but in reality, no one really reads them [...] We often have no idea how they are related to the village [...] Not reading the messages equates to being completely unaware, yet the village cadres assume you've received and understood them”, (R10).

Despite the fact that this arguably 'learned ignorance' towards government policies under long-lasting clientelist rural governance may affect the bottom-up ability of rural communities to participate in local decision-making and to negotiate with the government, it seems to be sufficient for cultivating activated communities within the NED framework. According to R1, they believed that the method of promoting rural employment and collective income through labour service contracting was effective, and also noted that this initiative had received coverage from a local official media and positive feedback from the government. It also helped in enhancing the mutual trust between the government, village cadres, and villagers. Since then, the MAZ has outsourced additional services, such as road and greenery maintenance within the zone, to the Lanjing Tourism Management Company.

The village also managed to gain a 100-million yuan grant from the MAZ to regenerate an abandoned village office building into a boutique bed and breakfast hotel. The right to operate the hotel was then transferred to an extra-local private tourism company for an annual rent of over 60,000 yuan per year and a 45% share of annual profits (about 200,000 yuan).

Another notable collaboration between Lanjing and the MAZ involved outsourcing the “Bamboo Alley Village Regeneration Project” to the community. The project not only improved the local living environment (Figure 7.4), but also achieved significant cost savings, in contrast with similar state-led projects (whose costs are typically about five times greater) (R2). According to the village party secretary (R3), the average monthly rural housing rent along the main road of the village has increased from 2000 yuan to 10,000 yuan after the regeneration. He proudly mentioned during the focus group:

“Ten years ago, our Lanjing Village was colloquially referred to as the 'Rotten Village' (i.e., a Chinese linguistic pun). There were no roads, only dirt tracks. The village pathways were disorderly and filthy, littered with garbage everywhere. The courtyards of the villagers were old and dilapidated. Now, it's like a garden [...] The last time experts from the United Nations came, they even said our place resembled Europe”, (R3).

By 2022, according to the R3, the Lanjing Tourism Management Company had provided over 1,200 part-time jobs, mostly through outsourcing contracts from the MAZ, and the collective revenue of Lanjing Village had surged to 400,500 yuan.



Figure 7.4 The main road of the Lanjing Village after the Bamboo Alley Village Regeneration Project (source: Author's own)

The successes achieved at Lanjing resulted in increased political interest from higher-level state actors. By 2021, over 30 provincial/ministry-level officials had visited the MAZ, and it had received several international and domestic awards, such as the “Bamboo Handicraft Training Base” from the INBAR, the designation “National 4A-level Tourist Attraction” from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT), and the “Sichuan Provincial-level International Practical Training Base for Natural Education” (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a). These titles heightened the reputation of Lanjing Village, and made it a regional demonstration project of the NRRS. This, in turn, endowed the village and its party secretary with special political energy. As the deputy director of Bureau of Agriculture said, “The village party secretary of Lanjing) had been asked to directly report to the provincial party secretary. Just think about it, he's not an ordinary person!” (R2).

Stimulated by state investment, the economy of Lanjing Village has been gradually revitalised whilst its connectivity with extra-local actors has been enhanced. Between 2011 and 2021, the number of village enterprises and workshops increased from 10 to 29. Of these, a majority focus on bamboo-related processing and the tourism industry, and about 20 rural migrants came back to start new businesses (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a). Some villagers have actively established agri-business organisations, such as cooperatives in bamboo planting and family farms, and there has been pooling of land between neighbours. Promoted by the unified land arrangement plan of the county government, 89% of the land has been rearranged and re-contracted by local households for rice and soy beans, or by extra-local professional farmers for cash crops such as vegetables and watermelon; thereby diversifying the agricultural structure of Lanjing (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a). In addition, and supported by the MAZ Management Committee, 49 bamboo products have been granted patents (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a).

In terms of extra-local linkages, economic ties between the village and urban areas have been enhanced through state-sponsored channels such as various bamboo festivals, exhibitions and partnerships with nationally- and internationally-operating corporations such as Hermes (Figures 7.5 and 7.6). It is also the case that innovative bamboo art products such as bamboo painting from Lanjing village have been sold to over 50

countries, and the bamboo art crafts have recently been listed by the provincial government in the China-EU Agreement on Geographical Indications (Bamboo MAZ Management Committee, 2022a).



Figure 7.5 Creative bamboo art products of Lanjing 1 (source: Author's own)



Figure 7.6 Creative bamboo art products of Lanjing 2 (source: Author's own)

However, the key extra-local players were state-owned enterprises from other cities which expressed political interest in developing Lanjing. It has become a flagship project of rural revitalization. Three state-owned enterprises transformed several vacant rural houses into restaurants, hotels, and an art museum (Figure 7.7) and, according to the R3, the village committee acted as the coordinator in handling land property issues during these redevelopment projects. These state-sponsored facilities provided rent amounting to approximately 130,000 yuan in 2021 (R3). As R2 implied, these state-sponsored facilities primarily serve as the demonstrative sites for top-down inspections and frequently venues for official banquets.

Furthermore, the county government specifically granted extra construction land to attract an art technical college<sup>23</sup> to Lanjing Village. As part of the agreement, the college started a new programme on bamboo art in collaboration with local bamboo art workshops, and it has since enrolled 2,500 students, bringing significant population growth to the county in 2021 (Bamboo MAZ Management Committee, 2022a).

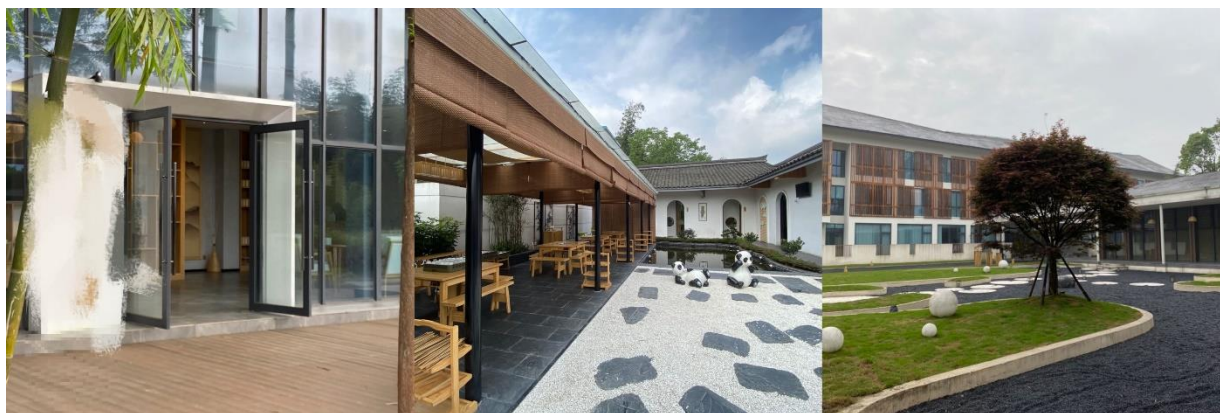


Figure 7.7 Museums, hotpot restaurant and a boutique hotel (from left to right) (source: Author's own)

The improvement in economic conditions has markedly heightened villagers' enthusiasm for participating in rural governance. This renewed engagement, coupled with strengthened trust between villagers and the cadre, has further solidified the bonding relationships within the community. According to the village party secretary (R3), crime levels, particularly theft, have fallen. Since 2021, the participation rates in village congress meeting have consistently been 100% (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022a). Moreover, as more residents began renovating their homes to align with the evolving environment of their hometown, it prompted the MAZ committee to collaborate with the town government to establish a village planning review institution that would oversee and guide the burgeoning housing renewal.

### 7.3 Delineation and coordination

#### *Critical incident 4: Establishment of new community self-governance organisations*

---

<sup>23</sup> It is a public-funded educational institute, and is therefore considered to be a state-owned entity.



The increased involvement of local residents and extra-local actors necessitated the village committee to revamp existing decision-making processes so as to ensure coordination across increasingly diverse actor networks. With regards to rural village governance, and given the rising trend of in-migration and public participation in the village, the village committee has recently expanded participatory channels for active local residents, entrepreneurs, and migrants by introducing two informal mechanisms — the “*xin xiang xian*” (new rural elite) Democratic Forum and the Villagers’ Forum — to the village congress meeting (the legislative decision-making body for rural community affairs), and village committee (the official rural autonomous governance entity).

Additionally, and as part of the town government's innovative party-building efforts, the village party members of Lanjing received political endorsement from the Town Party Committee's Organization Department and thence established a Party Member Service Team (R3). This team assists villagers in handling social security and administrative matters in urban areas. From the focus group with rural residents, it was found that in terms of economic development, the committee has established a Bamboo Art Inheritance Team to train rural housewives which is led by local listed art masters, and an Entrepreneur Incubation Team to mentor and guide future entrepreneurs which is led by outstanding local entrepreneurs. Furthermore, and to promote active civic participation, the village committee selects “model individuals or families” every quarter. This can be perceived as an effort to achieve the two national objectives of the NRRS: cultural civilization and effective governance. As R3 said, “the idea is to promote positive values and ethics”, which aligns with the vision and goals of the local government for NRRS: active rural party organisation, social stability, harmonious family relationships, innovative bamboo art business, dedicated bamboo art craftsmen, and beautiful rural dwelling landscapes.

The implementation of the Bamboo MAZ programme, coupled with the influx of external investment and the forging of collaborative partnerships, has led to a significant evolution in the intra-village mechanisms for everyday governance and interest distribution. This research identifies the actor network that underscores the collaborative innovation

process from the transformation of Lanjing Village into an activated community (Figure 7.8).

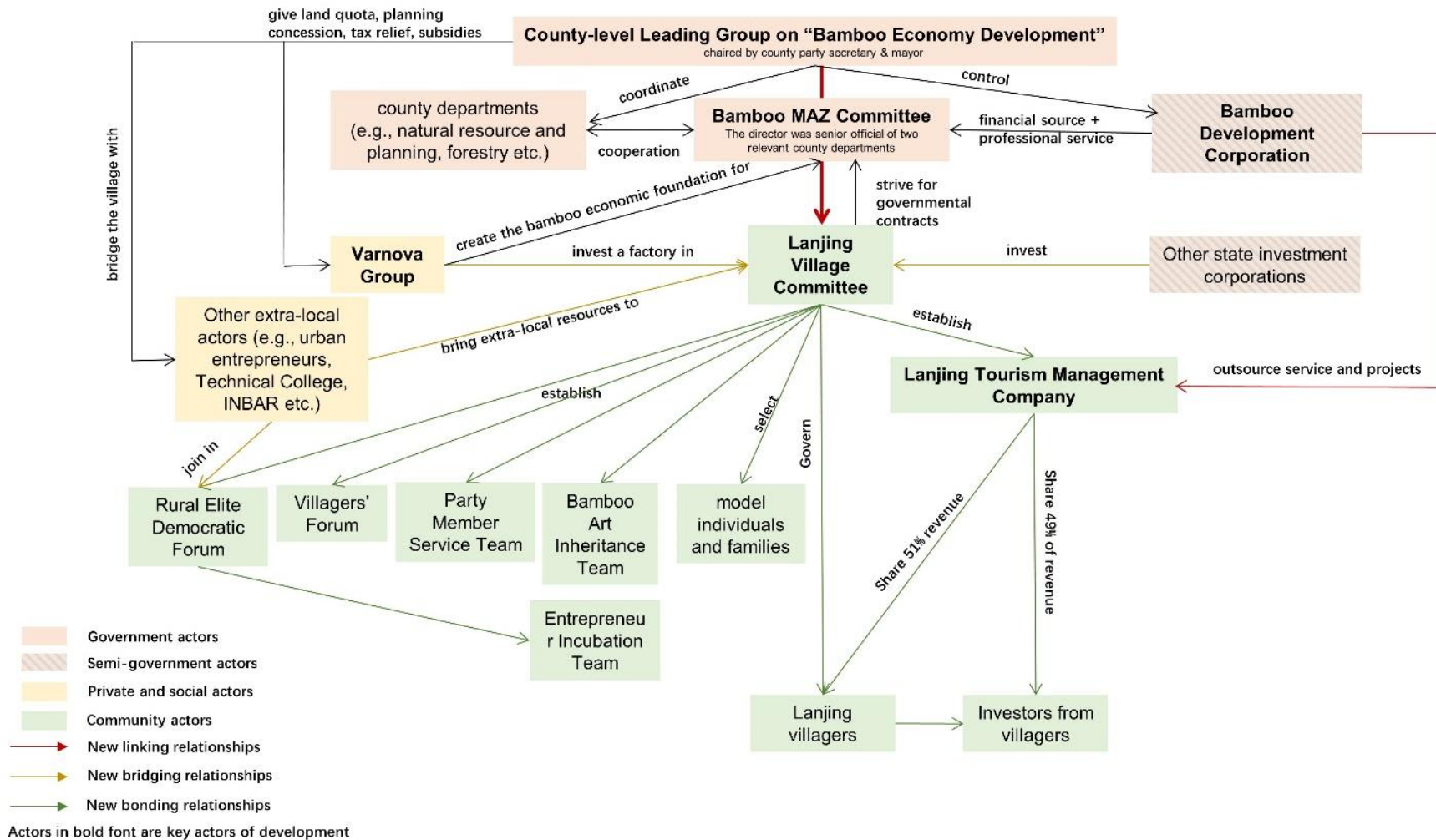


Figure 7.8 Actor network for the development of Lanjing village (Source: Author's own)

Within the local government narrative, Lanjing's trajectory is heralded as emblematic of success. Yet, while the flourishing of Lanjing's collective economy and its idyllic built environment stand as visible markers of achievement, they belie latent socio-economic intricacies.

To begin with, Lanjing's developmental arc is substantially tethered to injections of public capital, which positions the village as a significant beneficiary of a plethora of mechanisms. About 50% of the collective income of the village is from government contracts and 30% is from land rents from state-owned enterprises (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022b). This reliance on public fund exposes the village's developmental paradigm to the vicissitudes of macro-policy recalibrations. Presently, the reverberations of such shifts are discernible on two fronts. Foremost, the Bamboo Development Corporation, which serves as the linchpin financial fulcrum for MAZ, finds itself grappling with intensified political and fiscal strains, particularly in the wake of the central government's stringent oversight on the indebtedness of LGFVs (R1). As R1 stated:

"The primary source of their (Bamboo Development Corporation) revenue comes from mortgaging state-owned construction land; it doesn't generate much profit on its own. With the tightening of policies, they have begun charging us rent since we currently lease their building for our office. [...] They are essentially starting to operate independently from us, looking for their own projects to balance the books and address financial issues".

Moreover, in light of the global food crisis precipitated by the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia to, the MAZ policy of China's central government has begun to pivot towards those zones which primarily produce subsistence crops. Consequently, and as implied by R2, the future support for Bamboo MAZs appears uncertain. The food crisis has also led the central government to tighten its policies on farmland protection, constraining the future expansion and construction space for both the MAZ and Lanjing Village. As the village secretary remarked:

"There was originally a second phase for the Bamboo Valley Regeneration Project. However, since there's less than 100 mu (approximately 6.7 hectare) of construction land quota left, we are uncertain about how to proceed. Furthermore, contemplating future development after the completion of this phase presents challenges [...] Merely earning rental

income is certainly insufficient. We are exploring models of deeper collaboration with professional companies by contributing land and other assets as equity. This approach seeks to maximize benefits for our villagers, but it necessitates more land”.

Secondly, extra-local investments have offered limited tangible benefits to Lanjing Village. This poses further challenges to the sustainability of the economic model of this activated community. The primary contributor to the MAZ's economy was the Varnova Group, which accounted for more than 90% of the production value of the zone. However, through the interview with R17, it was found that the main factory of the company was located in a manufacturing enterprise park in order that it might receive higher subsidies, and therefore, taxes were not paid within the MAZ. The production value, as implied by the director of MAZ (R1), was primarily a statistical sleight of hand that did not generate substantial revenues for the zone. Additionally, there was no agreement to oblige Varnova to use local labour in its newly-built bio-refinery paper-making factory. According to the environmental impact assessment report, several highly effective waste disposal facilities had to be deployed to replace existent ones, and the total cost exceeded 50 million yuan per year (Sichuan Circle Science and Technology Company, 2019). Furthermore, the Art Technical College graduates did not join the local workforce in the bamboo art industry (R3), and Lanjing's latest comprehensive plan forecasts population decline of 1,300 people by 2035 (Qianfen County Government, 2021). These socio-economic challenges reveal the fragility of Lanjing's development model and highlight the need for more inclusive and sustainable approaches to rural development.

Thirdly, although the establishment of the Lanjing Tourism Development Company has led to an increase in collective revenue for the village through contracting government projects, the per capita income of villagers in 2021 was, 25,000 yuan; only marginally higher than the average of rural Qianfen (21,134 yuan) (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022b). In addition, and despite the company being founded as a village collective enterprise, interviews with villagers combined with dividend data recorded by the village committee in 2020 (Lanjing Village Committee, 2022b) reveal that, under the current profit-sharing mechanism, initial investors received dividends 40% higher than other residents. This has led to the gradual emergence of an elite group (primarily composed

of village party members and returnee entrepreneurs), which has captured a disproportionate share of the benefits from government investments, exacerbating income inequality.

#### **7.4 Summary**

The MAZ Programme facilitated the establishment of a local active party-state that leveraged its political authority to secure significant reaching-in public investments as well as extra-local investments and business cooperations to support Lanjing Village's transition from an impoverished village to a growing activated community with an improved socio-economic profile. The local traditional bamboo weaving craftsmanship has also been protected and developed with the support of local government investment.

However, the current actor-network supporting local development is heavily reliant on local government financial and political resources, the sustainability of which has been increasingly challenged by the recent institutional transitions of China's central government. Furthermore, the involvement of major private investors, such as the Varnova Group, is limited, with extra-local investments primarily coming from state-owned enterprises. The participatory and value-sharing mechanisms are dominated by village cadres who not only act as the state's agents, but have also become new rural elites at the centre of new distributional inequality within the village. As such, the social and financial sustainability of Lanjing's development is clearly questionable.

## Chapter Eight: Orange MAZ and Qianjiachi Village

Qianjiachi is renowned as an impoverished village in which corruption amongst the village officials is rampant. After the top-down party-building discipline campaign in 2013, a new village secretary of Qianjiachi led the community to reclaim barren hills and, through so doing, develop the Ponkan orange industry. This not only rebuilt community cohesion and reestablished urban-rural economic ties but also indirectly spurred the proposal for the Orange MAZ policy. After being selected as a “Liaison Village” by the Executive Office of CLGRW, the development of Qianjiachi accelerated even further. A stable cooperation with the local public authorities and the MAZ was established, enhancing the village’s resilience to market shocks and policy changes.

The Qianjiachi case study depicts how an active party-state with limited fiscal strength can transform a striving village into an activated community. Furthermore, the significance of this case study lies in its demonstrating how under the NED framework, villages do not necessarily require targeted investments from the government for their development. Instead, they can establish a healthy collaborative relationship with the government. Concurrently, the transformation of Qianjiachi village into a striving village (following a party-building discipline campaign) also affirms that Xi's rural development initiatives and its derived NED model are not solely confined to the 2018 NRRS policy. In fact, it represents a strategic combination of the national governance measures initiated in 2013 when Xi Jinping assumed leadership of the CPC. These measures signal a shift in social governance structure.

However, the rapid development of Qianjiachi after its having been designated as a Liaison Village also serves as a reminder that rural communities, regardless of their striving status, remain marginal and passive to the central government. Their growth still hinges on governmental authorisation, which transcends mere financial support and encompasses political/ideological permissions and institutional backing.

## 8.1 Problematisation

### *Critical incident 1: Restructuring of community leadership and initiation of reclaiming project*

Qianjiachi Village used to be renowned as a listed impoverished village in Qianfen. As the town mayor (R19) commented, “This village was notoriously problematic. The relationship between the cadres and the villagers was poor, there had been conflicts, it was hard to manage, and it was very backward”. The transformation of Qianjiachi into a typical striving village, and its subsequent development, can be traced back to a rural party discipline and integrity rectification campaign in 2013.

The county and town party committee led the restructuring of the village leadership. In 2013, under the “CPC Mass-line Education Campaign” (for details, see Section 5.1) initiated by the central government, the corrupt village secretaries and cadres of Qianjiachi were arrested. According to the deputy head of the Organization Department of County CPC Committee (R20) (who experienced the rebuilding of the village leadership at the time):

“At that time, the county government called for an immediate re-establishment of the village and party committee. Yet, the villagers had become profoundly disillusioned with the democratic election process, to the point where even orchestrating a simple election seemed insurmountable. Given these circumstances, we had to sidestep this conventional approach [...] We identified a rural returnee working as a village cadre, who had amassed considerable respect amongst the locals. Thanks to his urban experiences, particularly in city-based sales roles, this individual, having been exposed to broader horizons and showcasing innovative perspectives, was then designated as the village secretary”.

Along with the rectification of rural party members and cadres, the town party committee introduced a new evaluation system for village cadres so that the party leadership and control over the village’s governance structure could be rebuilt. This involved regular satisfaction surveys which targeted ordinary villagers who were neither party members nor cadres. This initiative supplemented the top-down party-building supervision process. The appointment and salaries of village cadres have been tied to assessment outcomes, which has served to motivate and discipline these officials. Furthermore, economic



incentives have also been linked to village party-building efforts, with top-performing village party secretaries eligible for 10% salary increases, while underperforming directors in the bottom 5% could be directly expelled from office by the town party committee. According to the town mayor (R19):

"(These initiatives) are part of our 'Party Fortress Project', implemented in response to the Party Central Committee's 'Mass-line Education Campaign' and NRRS to maintain the righting capacity of rural party organisations. Our objective is to strengthen the party member contingent and continuously elevate the cohesion, appeal, and combat capability of grassroots party organisations in rural areas.

On the one hand, we have the cadre supervision and management mechanisms (measures mentioned above) [...] Additionally, we have a tight organisational structure in place, forming a three-tier organisational framework that spans from the 'Administrative Village Party Committee' to the 'Villager Group Party Branch (Party Group)' and finally to the 'Party Member Liaison Household'.

Another pivotal focus is talent development [...] We have launched the 'New Era Village Cadre Empowerment Project'. This involves recruiting party members from outstanding returnee migrant workers, wealth creators (entrepreneurs), and other potential talents, promoting them to cadre roles, and engaging them in the cause of rural revitalisation. Qianjiachi serves as an exemplary case in this regard".

The newly-appointed village secretary played a pivotal role in reconfiguring the village governance structure of Qianjiachi. Through a bottom-up forest reclamation project, he effectively rebuilt the bonding relationships within the village by mending the relationships between the cadres and villagers, whilst also invigorating the social cohesion of the village. According to the focus group which comprised the village cadre and villagers, in about 1970 a local paper mill rented a substantial portion of land from Qianjiachi village to cultivate eucalyptus trees, and offered each household an annual rent of approximately 3,000 yuan. Regrettably, when the mill ceased operating, the rental revenues also stopped. The ensuing proliferation of eucalyptus groves not only drained the fertility of the soil but also intensified the dearth of cultivable land, and through so doing impeded the village's economic development. After assuming the role of village secretary, and drawing from his insights into the agricultural market garnered during his tenure as a village cadre, R21 advocated for the prompt reclamation of the eucalyptus forests to establish ponkan

orange orchards. The village secretary (R21) noted: “This decision was primarily influenced by Qianfen's longstanding history of cultivating ponkan oranges since 1990s. The accumulated experience and the established market for this fruit, although not dominant in the overall industry, made ponkan the most viable choice after comprehensive consideration at that time”.

However, this initiative encountered financial challenges and resistance from the villagers. The village secretary (R21) recounted:

“At that time, the town government informed me that this matter (reclamation) was strictly my own affair, and they couldn't provide financial support. This left me with no alternatives. Given my past business reputation for trustworthiness, some (friends of mine) were willing to assist me. Consequently, they extended credit to let me borrow the machinery needed for reclamation [...]

Another challenge was the lack of support from the villagers. This caused a dearth of labour force [...] Many (villagers) had ancestral graves located in those hills (covered by eucalyptus). Initiating the reclamation would necessitate relocating these graves, which understandably met with significant resistance. My only solution was to engage in door-to-door dialogues with each household”.

By mobilising both the cadres and the people of Qianjiachi, the village secretary successfully persuaded 70% of the community's residents to participate in the reclamation efforts (R21). To ensure smooth operations, the village committee was directed by the secretary to set up a temporary command post at the construction site, with village cadres on standby to promptly address any disputes or conflicts. During the four-month reclamation campaign, all participating village cadres and party members were asked to arrive first and leave last; thereby exemplifying the leadership and dedication expected of party members and cadres. During this project, approximately 2,000 orange trees were planted, and a 7-kilometre road was constructed. Over the following six months, the villagers carried manure up the mountain every day to nourish the soil and help its recovery.

This collective bolstered social cohesion between rural households and fostered renewed trust between the cadres and the local residents. In the focus group interview, a villager

remarked, "(During the reclamation,) it was really tough. Every worker in the village had blisters on their hands from hard work! [...] The enthusiasm and determination of the village secretary convinced us that he could lead our development. Indeed, the village has changed just as he had promised" (R23). The thesis argues that, through the reclamation project, the problematisation process of Qianjiachi was triggered.

### *Critical incident 2: Establishment of Orange cooperative and proposal of Orange MAZ*

After the reclamation, the village secretary discerned three principal impediments to the advancement of the local ponkan orange industry. First, a significant proportion of the villagers lacked proficiency in the techniques required to cultivate ponkan orange. Second, the distribution of land parcels to individual households was highly fragmented, rendering centralized management and efficient agricultural practices cumbersome. Lastly, there was an acute absence of robust marketing conduits for ponkan distribution. Compounding these challenges was the village's glaring infrastructural deficiencies. n. As the village party secretary noted: "The orchards, predominantly situated on the inclines, presented foreseeable logistic complications for downstream transportation of produce. To exacerbate matters, our village is devoid of even a basic tarmac road facilitating connectivity to the proximate highway" (R21).

To address these challenges, the village secretary established the Qianjiachi Orange Industrial Cooperative in 2014. According to the interviews with the village secretary (R21) and the manager of the cooperative (R22), the village committee advocated for villagers to join the cooperative, either through land or monetary investments, with both being treated as equity stakes in the cooperative. In collaboration with technicians from the Qianfen Bureau of Agriculture, the cooperative facilitated training sessions for villagers, and through so doing imparted vital cultivation techniques such as fruit bagging and pruning (R22).

In addition, and having been asked to do so by both the village committee and the Qianfen County Agriculture Bureau, the county government granted Qianjiachi village special

planning permissions and an extra construction land quota of 1500 m<sup>2</sup>, thereby enabling the construction of two cold storage facilities (Figure 8.1) which are both equipped with bio-detection capabilities which facilitate the storage of oranges (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2020). The training sessions have been of significant assistance to the farmers. As expressed by a senior local farmer:

"In today's fruit cultivation, it's not merely about the tree canopy growing lushly or producing an abundance of fruits. There's a greater emphasis now on when to thin fruit, when to apply fertiliser, and when to use pesticides! As an older individual, I have limited understanding of these sophisticated techniques. Thankfully, the cooperative has been instrumental in providing us with both agricultural resources and technical guidance at our doorstep!", (R26).



Figure 8.1 Cold storage facility of Qianjiachi (Source: Author's own)

Subsequently, capital raised from the villagers' equity contributions enabled the cooperative to bulk purchase agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and seeds at discounted rates; both attributed to the gaining of enhanced economies of scale (R22). Moreover, the cooperative, in conjunction with the village committee, orchestrated the internal reallocation and circulation of lands amongst villagers, and thereby ensured optimised utilisation and streamlined management (R22).

Through these institutional reforms in agricultural production, the village gained multifaceted socio-economic advantages. First, the village achieved economic benefits in

its bridging relationships with raw material suppliers. Second, within the village and without radically challenging the existing land ownership structure, the cooperative served to fortify economic ties among residents. It reinforced the village committee's leadership role in economic development, thereby solidifying the internal bonding relationships within the community.

Similar to Lanjing Village, the cooperative functions nominally as a village-owned collective economic organisation, and places a special emphasis on enhancing the employment opportunities and living standards of the impoverished population within the community. The cooperative incorporated 26 listed impoverished households into the cooperative without any charges. As expressed by an impoverished household member in a focus group interview:

"Both my wife and I are physically disabled, making it impossible for us to seek employment outside. We possess merely three mu of land (approximately 0.2 hectare) for cultivating ponkan oranges. However, we lack the technical know-how. Our soil was severely compacted, and our orchards were frequently plagued by pests and diseases [...] We could only earn around 3,000 yuan annually [...] we've accumulated a considerable amount of debt while trying to renovate our house [...] The cooperative subsequently crafted a specialised cultivation profile for my household, detailing our orange plantation's size, soil characteristics, and regional environment. They further assisted in planning our agricultural material purchases and provided hands-on technical guidance. Now, our annual earnings have been around 50,000 yuan, and we've successfully paid off our debts [...] I am truly grateful to R21 (the name of the village secretary) and the party and the government", (R23).

Under the concerted efforts of the cooperative, both the ponkan industry and the socio-economic development of Qianjiachi have experienced significant advancement. First, Qianjiachi village registered its own brand for the ponkan orange and, in 2017, earned the "Non-pollution Agricultural Product" trademark issued by MARA. Additionally, the cooperative was bestowed with the title of "Provincial Demonstrative Agricultural Cooperative" (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2020). By 2018, the Orange Industrial Cooperative had seen significant growth, boasting 178 household members and managing an expansive area in excess of 330 hectares. Impressively, 40% of this land had been transformed into eco-friendly "green orchards" that were designated by the

government (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2020). Within that same year, the mean annual income for cooperative members soared beyond 100,000 yuan, with the mean shareholding earnings per member reaching 2,376 yuan (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2020). The members of every listed impoverished household became engaged workers within the cooperative. By 2019, their involvement had successfully propelled them beyond the threshold of extreme poverty.<sup>24</sup> In addition, and according to a report from the town government, the spillover effects of the Qianjiachi Orange Industrial Cooperative radiated beyond the village itself, positively impacting over 1,500 households in Qianjiachi and neighbouring regions (Ditai Town Government, 2020).

In addition to the Orange Industrial Cooperative and based on his observations of the operation of the village's pohan industry after reclamation, the village secretary penned, in 2014, a proposal expressing hope that the county government would introduce measures to support the local orange industry. This proposal was presented to the then-deputy director of the Qianfen Bureau of Agriculture, and left a significant impression on the same (R21). It subsequently served as the basis for official departmental documents, which were passed up through the bureaucratic hierarchy. Ultimately, this led the county government to launch the “Ponkan Zone” project in 2015 (R21).

## **8.2 Expression of interest**

### *Critical incident 3: Establishment and progression of Orange MAZ*

In 2015, the Qianfen County Government invested 30 million yuan to construct a “Ponkan Zone”. The zone was recognised as a "Provincial-level Demonstration Zone of Modern Standardized Agriculture" in the same year; reflecting the government's commitment to promoting the local orange industry.

---

<sup>24</sup> The criteria for listed impoverished households to be considered to have been lifted out of poverty are as follows: Their annual per capita net income must consistently surpass the national poverty alleviation benchmark (627 yuan/year), and they should not have concerns about basic needs such as food and clothing. Additionally, they should be assured of nine years of compulsory education, have basic medical coverage, have guaranteed secure housing, have access to safe drinking water, possess household electricity, and have access to radio and television services.

The establishment of the "Ponkan Zone" followed a similar process to that of the Bamboo MAZ. However, given that this was a bottom-up local proposal rather than a top-down directive from senior leadership, the political impetus behind the Ponkan Zone was relatively diminished. First, a county-level "Leading Group on Orange Economy Development" was established that was comprised of several county departments, including the Bureau of Natural Resources, the Bureau of Agriculture, the Bureau of Environmental Protection, and the Bureau of Development and Reform (R2). Each county department was instructed to appoint a liaison official to the group. However, in contrast to the Bamboo MAZ, the "Leading Group" was chaired by the county mayor rather than the party secretary, thereby reflecting the lesser degree of political attention that the project received. In addition, the "Ponkan Zone" was managed by the Bureau of Agriculture rather than an independent administrative entity.

In 2019, the zone was rebranded as the "Orange MAZ", in response to the MAZ policy of the central government. The county government set its goal; achieving the designation of "National-level MAZ" (R2). This transition enhanced institutional and fiscal support for the zone. The Orange MAZ Management Committee was established by the "Leading Group". The committee comprised 14 civil servants, including 6 officials at the (deputy-) town/section-level (R18). These officials, seconded from the county Bureau of Agriculture, brought with them extensive expertise in either orange cultivation or industrial management. Furthermore, and in acknowledgment of the inherent unpredictability associated with the development of the orange industry, the "Leading Group" tempered the performance evaluation assessment for MAZ officials, and thereby fostered an environment which was conducive to policy innovation. As articulated by the director of Orange MAZ (R18), "County leaders are aware of the complexities inherent in rural revitalisation efforts. They're quite considerate, and the performance assessments are relatively lenient, generally rating most of us as 'outstanding'".

Fiscally, beyond the subsidies awarded from both central and provincial governments due to its MAZ designation, the Orange MAZ receives a special allocation of approximately 550,000 yuan from the county budget annually (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022a). In 2018, to bolster the NRRS, the county government instituted the Agricultural

Development and Investment Corporation, a state-owned LGFV, which also gave fiscal support to the MAZ (R18). However, when compared with the Bamboo MAZ, the financial resources channelled from the county government to the Orange MAZ can be seen to have been relatively limited. First, the annual budget for the Orange MAZ equated to only 40% of that allocated to the Bamboo MAZ (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022a). Furthermore, from 2019 to 2021, the total investment to the Orange MAZ amounted to approximately 490 million yuan, of which 120 million was comprised of governmental subsidies, with 370 million coming from private investment. Within the realm of private investment, 70% originated from large enterprises within the zone, while the remaining 30% was raised from village community funds (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2020). This distribution also highlights the characteristics of a striving village located in a rural region within the Orange MAZ.

Despite its being limited by financial and land resources, this study posits that the Orange MAZ has had a more significant impact on the local socio-economic profile than the Bamboo MAZ. In 2021, the average income of Qianjiachi was over 32,000 yuan, 51% higher than the average rural income level of the county in 2021. This study posits that these outcomes largely emanated from the positive resonance between the village's bottom-up development vision and the county government's top-down industrial policy. Compared to government-led high-investment tourism facilities, the linking relational resources introduced by the Orange MAZ — mainly in the form of pertinent agricultural infrastructure and technical support for orange planting, storage and transportation (Table 8.1) — bear a closer nexus to the livelihood of common rural households within the zone. For instance, during the “Ponkan Zone” period, the Bureau of Agriculture invested over 300 million yuan in constructing a 20-kilometre-long loop line through the hilly area, which connected Qianjiachi Village to the highway towards Chengdu. According to the village party secretary (R21), these new roads “have dramatically changed the fate of the local orange industry” and enhanced the locational advantage of Qianjiachi. He further noted that:

“Previously, though there was a road leading into the village, it was narrow and aged. This presented challenges, especially for larger vehicles, inhibiting them from entering. (Consequently,) villagers faced difficulty



transporting their ponkan oranges to the city in a timely manner to trade for money. Distributors were also hesitant to visit, substantially hindering the village's development. [...] (Subsequently,) the government constructed this industrial ring road that passed through our village, wide enough to accommodate two large trucks side by side [...] The MAZ further developed a dual-purpose asphalt roadway, catering to both cargo transportation and sightseeing, along with a network of production pathways. Now, cargo trucks can drive directly to even the remote terrains within the mountains". (R21)

The zone started holding a Qianfen Orange Festival from 2015 onwards with the goal of linking the community to outside markets. This festival attracted over 50,000 tourists and retailers and resulted in the sale of over 30,000 tons of oranges. Furthermore, and predicated on the sustained investment in internet infrastructure, the county government and JD.com Group, a leading e-commerce company in China, jointly established an e-business training base in 2018 to teach local households the skills of emerging livestreaming sales through short video platforms such as TikTok.

These governmental supports substantially elevated the quality of life of local residents as well as their sense of well-being:

"In the past, more than half of the village lacked mobile signal. Now, every household has access to high-speed internet and WIFI" (R24).

"Previously, the unstable electricity meant even if we bought major appliances, they were unusable. Now, we even enjoy air conditioning in the summer" (R26).

"We used to be anxiety if the oranges couldn't be sold promptly. Now, with the fresh fruit cold storage in the village, we can stagger our sales, often fetching even higher prices" (R27).

Table 8.1 Selected supportive projects and policies by the Orange MAZ (Source: Author's own)

Supportive projects and policies	Content
<b>Agricultural training</b>	Combine agricultural technicians and local self-taught experts to form tutor teams that train local orange farmers. Link the final output to the economies of these tutors.
<b>Land rearrangement and scale farming</b>	A subsidy of 1,500 yuan per hectare was offered for the standardization of large-scale intensive farming of high-quality oranges, provided that these activities comply with the local plan;

	<p>A subsidy of 750 yuan per hectare was made available for those who rent land for scale farming;</p> <p>Orchards undertaking self-improvement of infrastructure qualify for subsidies of 7,500 yuan per hectare;</p> <p>Orchards with IoT infrastructure can obtain an additional subsidy of 4,500 yuan per hectare.</p>
<b>Economic structure and cultivation diversification</b>	<p>Newly-established agro-processing enterprises are eligible for subsidies equivalent to 1% of their total sales income;</p> <p>Enterprises cultivating new types of oranges on plots exceeding 33 hectares can receive a 500,000-yuan subsidy;</p> <p>National or provincial-level cooperatives are eligible for subsidies of 10,000 yuan;</p> <p>National and provincial-level listed leading enterprises qualify for subsidies of 400,000 yuan and 50,000 yuan respectively.</p>
<b>Brand construction and market exploration</b>	<p>Enterprises/cooperatives successfully registering for national/provincial-level famous brand status can receive awards of 50,000 yuan. The responsible authority can receive an additional 100,000 yuan;</p> <p>Those operating specific stores for Qianfen agricultural products, or having fixed locations in agricultural wholesale markets in intermediary and large cities (with total sales amounting to &gt;500t and income &gt;3 million yuan), are eligible for 30,000-yuan subsidies;</p> <p>Individuals securing the title of 'sales champion' can receive an award of 5,000 yuan.</p>

*Critical incident 4: Designation as the Liaison Village of the central authority*

From 2019, the developmental momentum of Qianjiachi surged remarkably, especially in terms of the area's living environment. This increase was attributed not only to its central location within the MAZ, but also to the intensified political focus that it had received, and the infusion of linking relational resources. The village's success narrative was extensively chronicled by affiliated state media, and drew the attention of top-tier officials in Maozhan Prefecture. In that year, the Executive Office of the CLGRW, which serves as China's paramount rural policy-making institution and is chaired by a vice-premier, was on the lookout for a "Liaison Village" in Sichuan that would epitomise the strides made under the NRRS initiative. As per the director of Orange MAZ (R18), initially, the county government overlooked Qianjiachi given its relatively nascent foundation in built

environment and economy, whilst local bureaucrats still harboured reservations about the village leadership's capabilities. As R19 said:

“Although Qianjiachi had achieved certain accomplishments, to be honest, the county still remembered its past issues. Publicising its success was acceptable since progress had indeed been made in rural revitalisation. However, the 'Liaison Village' was, after all, representative of the county's prestige. The county leaders at the time felt it would be best to select a village, like Lanjing, for instance, that had the longest history of engagement and one that most fittingly embodied the image of Qianfen”. (R19)

Nevertheless, a senior party leader from the Maozhan Prefecture, deeply intrigued by Qianjiachi's success narrative, directly nominated it as the candidate for the “Liaison Village”. This nomination catalysed a greater influx of party-state-backed support for the village.

Following its nomination as a candidate village, Qianjiachi received greater political and economic support from the Qianfen Government because it sought to showcase Qianjiachi as an example of rural revitalisation. The support received included frequent visits from officials from county government, the MAZ, and the town government (R19, R21). Numerous officials were asked to stay in Qianjiachi for several months to investigate and improve local physical and socio-economic conditions. According to the chair of town people's congress, a chief leader of town government:

"I was in charge of improving and rectifying the living environment in Qianjiachi at that time, and the village still had quite a few 'outstanding bills' (underdevelopment issues). I slept on the construction site for over a month without going home. To be honest, it was really tiring. My wife works in the county Bureau of Culture and Tourism, and sometimes she would come down to the village to see me. It was indeed a challenging period for us. [...]"

When asked why he chose to sleep on the construction site, he said: “The higher-up leaders said that we had to complete the task on time and with quality, then I had to stay over there. [...] you can think of it as a gesture that I'm taking the order seriously”

Through these efforts from county and town governments, the built environment of Qianjiachi was greatly improved, and personal connections between the village director

and officials were strengthened through frequent meetings and a range of collaborative projects. As the village party secretary noted,

“The county is small, whether they get promoted or not, these local officials basically move in the same circle. You can imagine that such relationships will surely have a positive impact on the future of Qianjiachi [...] Personally, I think that it (this experience of campaigning for the “Liaison Village”) played a significant role in improving some of the negative perceptions previously associated with our village [...] Now, I am quite familiar with the leaders from the county bureaus as well as those in our town”, (R21).

In the ensuing period of being designated as a “Liaison Village”, the village consistently secured a myriad of honours and associated programme funds from upper-level government agencies. In the same year that it became a “Liaison Village”, Qianjiachi was awarded several national-level ‘hats’, including “National Demonstration Village for Rural Governance” and “National ‘One Village, One Product’ Demonstration Village”, and a range of provincial-level awards including: “Provincial-level Rural Revitalisation Demonstration Village”, “Sichuan Innovation and Reform Village”, “Provincial-level Culture-led Revitalisation Demonstration Village”, and “National Public Consultation Innovation Pilot Village” (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2022).

With the presence of such a ‘star village’ in its jurisdiction, the Orange MAZ was subsequently able to secure more financial and institutional resources from the county government (R18). Between 2019 and 2021, the expenditure budget of the MAZ rose from 200,000 yuan to 4 million yuan, and a 500,000-yuan independent project fund was established in 2021 (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022a; 2020). This allowed for several physical infrastructure projects to be implemented, such as a cold-chain logistics facility project (12 million yuan), a high-standard arable land construction project (25 million yuan), and an agricultural social service supporting scheme (2 million yuan) (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022b).

In addition, by updating the comprehensive plan of the MAZ, the county government allocated an extra construction land quota for agricultural infrastructure in 2019 (R18). In addition, professional farmers in the zone were permitted to use 5% of their contracted farmland to build agricultural facilities without seeking permission from the county

government (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022b). According to R18, “this is important and courageous institutional breakthrough, especially given that it's related to land [...] The county government's reform plays a significant role in promoting flexible development in rural revitalisation. Our zone served as a crucial pilot for this initiative”.

As a result of these institutional innovations, the length of the loop line for agricultural transportation increased from 20 to 140km between 2015 and 2021 (greatly increasing the accessibility of many orange growing areas) (Orange MAZ Management Committee, 2022b). This also enhanced the development of orchards in Qianjiachi village and furthered land reclamation efforts. As village party secretary (R21) noted, “the Management Committee told me that wherever we work, the road will be built up to that point. This confirmed our resolution to expand our orange orchards”. It was also the case that an automatic sorting and cold-chain base, as well as an orange exhibition park, were constructed within the zone to facilitate the further growth of the local orange industry.

The relaxation of rural land use controls, combined with the construction of agricultural logistics infrastructure and roads, also promoted the growth of extra-local agri-businesses. The Miaoyuanzhen Company, a prefectural-level listed leading agri-business founded by a Malaysian Chinese businessman, invested over 260 million yuan in the Orange Zone to build an advanced automatic sorting and cold-chain logistics hub (Figure 8.2), and the company provided employment opportunities to over 400 local rural households, including those in Qianjiachi. Moreover, the MAZ has successfully incubated several regionally influential companies and social organisations, such as the Tianqiushengzhi Company and the Tangshuping Orange Cooperative Alliance. The former was a provincial-level leading agribusiness focused on agricultural exports, and the latter was a county-wide cooperative alliance with 2871 households as members. These agri-enterprises diminished the villagers' reliance on distributors to link their orange products with external markets, and led to an enhancement of their net incomes. As an orange farmer in Qianjiachi noted:

“We have our own cold-chain logistics company. Without those “middlemen”, when we sell our oranges, we receive the full 5 yuan. With middlemen, we only get 4.8 yuan or even as low as 4.5 yuan. When

middlemen buy our fruits, they earn at least 2,000 yuan from every 5,000 kg. But with our own cold-chain company coming here to purchase, for every 5000 kg of fruit, our villagers earn an additional 2,000 yuan” (R28).



Figure 8.2 A bird view of orange sorting and cold-chain base within the Orange MAZ (Source: Qianfen Government, 2022)

Bridged by the county government, Qianjiachi Village also established strategic partnerships with several leading research institutes, including the China Agricultural University and the Sichuan Academy of Agriculture Sciences. The village party secretary mentioned that he was even invited to domestic academic conferences concerning rural governance (R21). Such linkages attracted a greater number of scholars to study and support the orange industry of Qianjiachi village as well as its rural governance strategies. As a result, several research institutes were established in the zone, including the “Orange Engineering and Technology Research Centre”, and the “Rural Revitalisation Research Institute”, as well as an agricultural teaching and training base for postgraduate students. An executive director of a research centre who was briefly encountered during an interview with the town mayor<sup>25</sup> said:

“The initiative of establishing these centres represents a significant initiative by the university's party committee, which is firmly grounded in serving the overarching objectives of party-building work. It fully leverages the university's expertise in agricultural research, proactively assumes the political mission of the university's party organization, and is a paramount strategy in the university's commitment to rural revitalisation [...] It is also

---

<sup>25</sup> A comprehensive formal interview was not undertaken with this individual, and therefore he has not been included in the list of interviewees.

integral to the university's ambitious plans to expedite its transformation into a world-class institution with distinct Chinese agricultural characteristics”.

Over 30 postgraduate students have graduated from the institutes, and several doctoral researchers have conducted their studies on the local orange industry. Such studies and researchers offer regular consulting services on agricultural policy and techniques to key villages such as Qianjiachi (R21).

### **8.3 Delineation and coordination**

#### *Critical incident 5: Expansion of party organisations and services within the zone and village*

Starting in 2019, and under the impetus of the MAZ party committee and the town party committee, the locality progressively established a party-led actor network through embedding party branches into villages, agri-enterprises, and other non-governmental entities. This party-led actor network has cemented the leadership position of the party in rural economic development and social governance. According to the director of the Orange MAZ Management Committee (R18), the Management Office established six new party branches. Three of these were called “industrial chain party branches”, established specifically to coordinate all governance affairs in three key sectors of the local orange industrial chain, namely; plantation, marketing, and tourism (R18). The other three were called “new-type socio-economic organisation party branches”, and were established to support and guide emerging local and extra-local social actors, such as the Tianqiushengzhi Company, the Miaoyuanzhen Company, the Tangshuping Cooperative Alliance, and local professional farmers (R18).

Beyond agricultural development, party power has been further extended into the community-building process. According to the deputy head of Organisation Department of County CPC Committee (R20), the county government has established a 50,000-yuan “Community Organisation Incubation Foundation” through fund-raising from towns and village and donation from rural elites to allow the county government to fund the establishment and operation of bottom-up community organisations that provide social services such as home-based elderly care and care for left-behind children. As she noted:

“These (community organisations) are diverse, encompassing areas such as dispute mediation, elderly care, child rearing, industrial development, and ceremonies related to weddings and funerals, among others [...] The primary goal of these entities is to establish platforms for villagers to articulate their interests and concerns. Additionally, they aim to enhance the overall quality and capabilities of the farmers, preserve and propagate traditional culture, enrich community life, and fortify the self-management and self-service capacities of the villagers. Furthermore, they serve to extend the service reach of the party, thereby raising the standard of services available at the community level”. (R20)

In Qianjiachi Village, and with financial backing from the town government, party branches were instituted within each village group. Each party member from the village was delegated to oversee approximately 10 villagers. This intricate system of village party-building was dubbed the "micro-battlefield", designed to respond swiftly to local demands, and to streamline the execution of top-down directives and mobilisation initiatives (R18).

In 2020, and with financial backing from the town government, Qianjiachi Village initiated the "Qianjiachi Neighbourhood" project. This initiative aimed to regenerate abandoned residential plots into public spaces, and to construct a public lecture hall and a village history museum (Figure 8.3). The public lecture hall was designed for assembly and training purposes, and to provide a space for local villagers, external technicians, and entrepreneurs to share development visions, business knowledge, life experience, and agricultural techniques. Meanwhile, the hall also serves as a venue for the "Villagers' Forum", which was established as a complement to the formal village congress meeting. The forum is designed to address local concerns related to top-down state initiatives, including sectoral subsidies, land expropriation, and the development of agritourism. The public lecture hall was also the office of a "Peacemaker Team" which was also formed and was comprised of local rural elites, former village party cadres, and individuals familiar with governmental rules and laws. The team was tasked with regularly mediating conflicts between local households. Additionally, the village committee built a village history museum, with local households donating items such as old photos, to help preserve the community's collective memory.





Figure 8.3 On the left is the lecture schedule at the entrance of the public lecture hall, and on the right are photos of the village history museum (Source: left, Author's own; right, Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2022).

The village has experienced a cultural revival, marked by the introduction of novel community-based cultural initiatives which have fostered socio-cultural ties and enhanced communal cohesion. Leveraging governmental financial resources allocated for village party-building, a monthly collective birthday celebration for senior residents was instituted. Additionally, square dancing ensembles and cultural performance groups were established to perform during traditional Chinese festivities.

The county government initiated a project called “Outstanding Villagers Come Back” to encourage rural migrants to return and start businesses or join the grassroots party-building process. Younger and educated returnees were often encouraged to become party members and even appointed as village cadres to enhance party leadership within communities. From 2018 to 2021, the average age of village directors decreased from over 50 to 44 years old, and 90% of village cadres held degrees above high school level (Ditai Town Government, 2021).

These party-state-funded expansion of community organisations and activities have improved the bonding relationship between the cadres and the people, and stripped away some of the former bureaucracy and separation of the village committee. Interviews with

villagers revealed that they were now more willing to participate in village congress meetings and to communicate with the village committee and party cadres on a range of issues. As noted by the village secretary (R21):

"The primary purpose of these measures is to ensure that the people understand the party organisation always stands with them [...] villagers were once disjointed in their engagement with public affairs, resembling scattered sand. However, they have since become more organised and cohesive, demonstrating a willingness to contribute to community development". (R21)

A report on town government (Ditai Town Government, 2021) indicates that the number of social conflicts and appeals in Qianjiachi has declined by over 50%. The effectiveness of these measures in fostering enhanced participation in village governance and promoting social stability has received affirmation from the residents. For instance:

"Neighbours used to have frequent conflicts, mainly due to land disputes, like 'you took my land' or 'you cut down my tree'. Now, to be honest, everyone has money, so there's no need to argue [...] The village committee also organizes many activities, which has helped improve relationships among us" (R23)

"I often assist in preparing dishes for the elderly's birthday banquets, and it brings me immense joy. [...] Typically, I am occupied from eight in the morning until noon. [...] Everyone is keen on participating in such activities; there's a shared fondness for these lively gatherings. (R24)

Regarding the value of investing in these community party-building activities, the town mayor (R19) stated that these governance innovations "resolve social conflicts at the grassroots level" and ensure that "small problems are tackled within village groups, and larger problems are addressed at the village level [...] strive to avoid escalating the conflicts to the government [...] to maintain a harmonious relationship between the government and the masses".

These 'bottom-up' governance measures, steered by the party and supported by backing from superior governmental entities and the MAZ, collectively established the actor network which was essential to the progress of Qianjiachi village as an activated community (Figure 8.4).

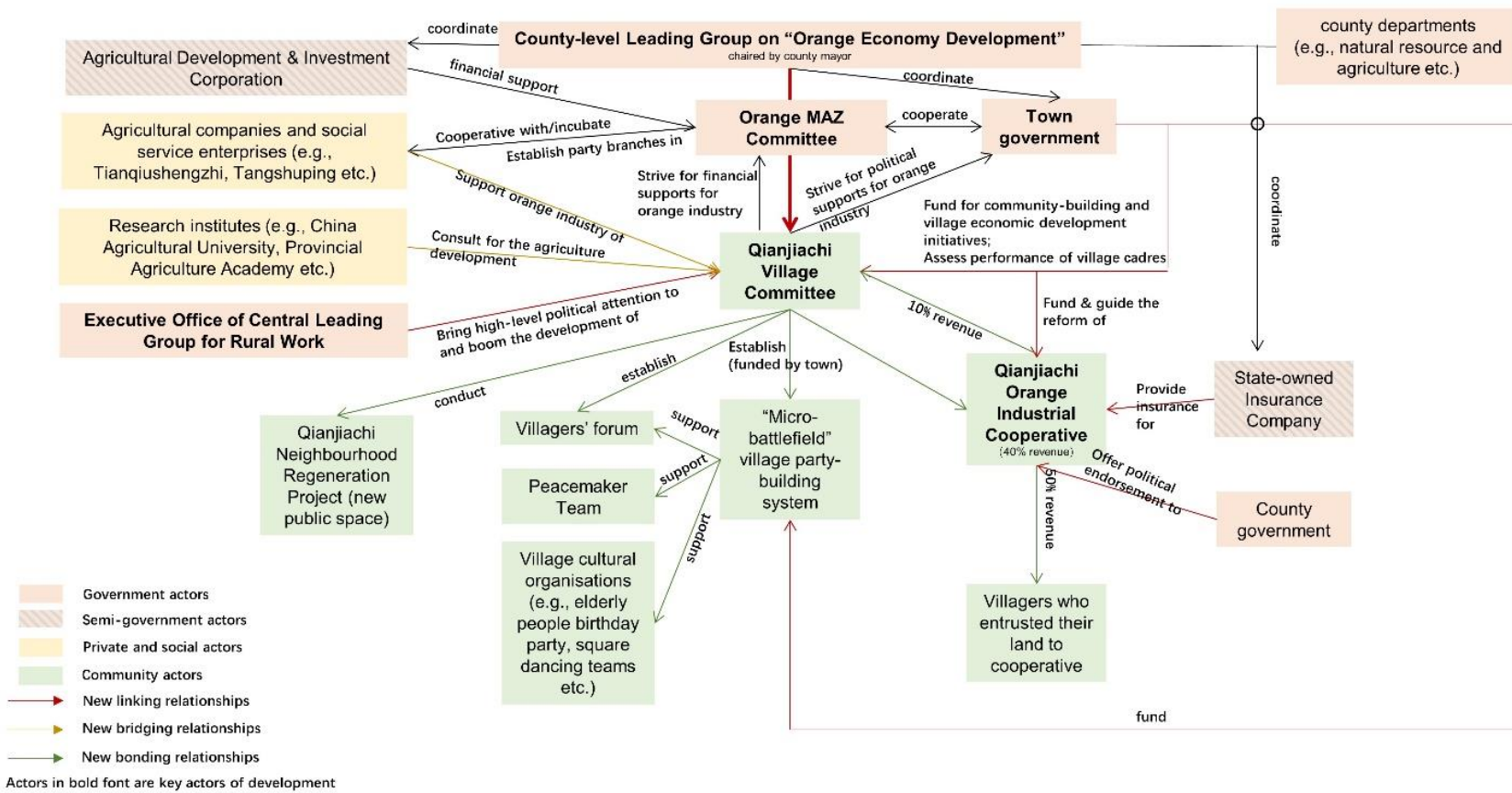


Figure 8.4 Actor network for the development of Qianjiachi village (Source: Author's own)

### *Critical incident 6: Bottom-up land entrustment reform*

Through the political endorsement conferred by this governance network under the party's leadership, the village committee adeptly executed political and economic reforms in response to the volatilities that stemmed from the orange market. From 2018 onwards, local orange prices started to fall mainly because of declining product quality from small farmers (R21). This led to a decrease in the volume of sales and a loss of local trust in, and enthusiasm for, the “Orange Cooperative”, which greatly impacted the current leadership of Qianjiachi (R21).

In response, the village committee initiated a ‘land entrustment’ reform in 2020, which encouraged smallholders to transfer the operational rights of their orange orchards to the cooperative. This allowed for greater professional management of the orchards, reduced costs through group purchasing of agricultural inputs, and improved the quality of local oranges by making them more sustainable and organic. However, the renewal of the operational model of the cooperative and its value-sharing mechanism encountered resistance from smallholders who struggled to reach a consensus on the reform.

To address this dilemma, the village committee asked for financial and institutional support from local government to implement the land entrustment reform. The town mayor convened meetings with various stakeholders, including village cadres, smallholder delegates, the cooperative manager, rural experts from universities, and relevant county departments to promote the reform (R19). In order to emphasise the significance of the meetings (and the urgency of the reform), the mayor invited a county government leader, together with a county-level CPPCC commissioner, to co-chair the meetings. Through so doing they gained political endorsement for the reform (R19).

The linking relationships enhanced by involving the CPPCC commissioner helped the town government to acquire a 700,000-yuan fund from the Organisation Department of the Qianfen County CPC Committee. Such investment made the reform a local flagship rural party-building project (R19). Together with 400,000-yuan of money raised through a community mobilisation undertaken the village party secretary, the Qianjiachi Orange Industrial Cooperative invested 1.2 million yuan (as an initial fund) on land transfer fees

to the villagers and the purchase of essential agricultural production materials (R21). Supported by the town government, the village committee devised a novel approach during the land consolidation process. They decoupled land ownership shares from the physical redrawing of property boundaries<sup>26</sup>. This separation allowed for the collective management of farmland, facilitating more efficient agricultural practices (R21). Meanwhile, under the coordination of the MAZ Management Committee, a local state-owned insurance company agreed to provide agricultural insurance to the cooperative (R18).

In terms of value-retainment and sharing, the community raised a new “5+4+1” value-sharing mechanism, in which 50% of the profits went to the smallholders who entrusted their land, 40% to the cooperative, and 10% to the rural collective (Qianjiachi Village Committee, 2020). Smallholders had the option of investing in-kind (i.e., land and orange trees) or monetarily, and in addition to the dividend income from their equity share in the cooperative and fixed land rent, they could receive extra labour service income by working in the service team of the cooperative.

According to the village secretary, this mechanism was decided upon as a consequence of multiple discussion within the village council under the guidance of leaders from various governmental levels and the advice of experts from the China Agricultural University. As a result, and compared to the profit-sharing scheme of Lanjing village, it exhibits greater inclusivity. As the secretary elaborated:

"After several rounds of discussions, we decided to specifically design an upper limit for shareholding to prevent wealthy individuals from becoming dominant and taking away all the profits, which could exacerbate wealth disparities [...] We have designated 10% of the cooperative's earnings as

---

<sup>26</sup> Villagers who entrust their land to the cooperative gain shares proportional to their land's size, entitling them to a share of the cooperative's profits. Given that individual land holdings are dispersed and of varying fertility, cooperatives must reconsolidate boundaries for efficient operation, leading to potential reassignment of plots. Nevertheless, for dividend distribution, the village committee relies on the initial land amounts contributed by villagers, not on the post-reorganization land divisions. To ensure the villagers' equity interest and dividends, the village committee bases dividend distribution on the total amount of land initially contributed, rather than on the new land boundaries established after the cooperative's reorganization.

collective profit, which is specifically allocated to the impoverished families within the village” (R21).

*Critical incident 7: Adaptive strategy to MAZ policy shift by government-village coalition*

Similar to Lanjing village, and due to the policy shift towards subsistence crops, both the orange industry of Orange MAZ and Qianjiachi village are facing challenges. In 2022, Qianfen County Government invested 500 million yuan to establish a Rice MAZ, covering an area of approximately 70 km<sup>2</sup> that encroached on several villages within the Orange MAZ, including Qianjiachi (R18). The comprehensive plan for the Rice MAZ prioritised the conservation of arable land and limited land use to the cultivation of subsistence crops (R18). This more restrictive development control has hindered the involvement of extra-local investors seeking construction land and resulted in the compulsory conversion of some orange orchards into paddy fields (R18; R19; R21).

To address the challenge, the MAZ Management Committee, in partnership with the leading agricultural research institutes in Qianjiachi, initiated a pilot project aimed at co-cultivating soybeans (subsistence crop) and oranges to avoid the conversion of orange groves into rice paddies. Additionally, through the efforts of the town government and village committee, the comprehensive plan for the Rice MAZ designated Qianjiachi as a “Pilot Village for Paddy Field Landscape Management”, thereby allowing for greater flexibility in land use planning, especially in the realm of agritourism and orange industry (R18).

However, the director of MAZ Management Committee (R18) warned that the direct subsidies and political focus on the orange economy might still be reduced, as the MARA tends to prioritise the production of subsistence crops when evaluating applications for national-level MAZs. The director commented: “the previous practice of converting farmland into orange orchards and the allocation of additional land quotas to agricultural companies will no longer be tolerated” (R18).

## 8.4 Summary

As a striving village, the community of Qianjiachi, under the leadership of its party secretary, has demonstrated a more pronounced local agency compared to Lanjing. This has been achieved by restoring bonding relationships and using community mobilisation to build a sustainable orange industry. Instead of depending on government contract or the tourism, they have developed their own agricultural industry.

Economic growth has subsequently bolstered social cohesion within the village and led to a cultural renaissance, which has been characterised by the establishment of a myriad community organisations and local cultural activities. These steps have rejuvenated the village's collective memory and revived the enthusiasm of the villagers to partake in its development. As a result, the growth trajectory of Qianjiachi village exhibits more endogenous characters than Lanjing.

However, the pivotal role the government has played in facilitating and steering the development of Qianjiachi village should not be overlooked. The reshuffling of leadership of Qianjiachi emerged as a direct corollary of central government's initiative which sought to revamp and streamline rural party cadres. Additionally, the flourishing of the orange industry was inextricably linked to the local government's assertive endeavours when it came to integrating indispensable infrastructure, encompassing roads, cold-chain logistics, and agricultural intermediary companies. An emblematic instance of the pivotal influence of active party state is the designation as the "Liaison Village" by central administrative bodies. This designation captured the undivided attention of local government, precipitated substantial enhancements in infrastructural facets, fostered a renewed sense of trust between the village and its governing bodies, and ensured the village's successful procurement of several developmental grants and accolades.

Moreover, while the mushrooming bottom-up community organisations ostensibly signify grassroots socio-economic vitality, their primary stewardship rests with the village party committee, bolstered by financial support from the town party committee. In the eyes of the government, these organisations primarily pre-emptively address and mitigate potential societal disagreements within the rural community, circumventing complications

at more elevated administrative levels. This governance approach mirrors the age-old Chinese approach to rural governance characterised by a preference for intermediaries-driven minimal bureaucratic overheads towards national integration (see Chapter Four).

In contrast to Lanjing, another intriguing dimension emerges from the unique and somewhat fluid alliance between Qianjiachi and the local government during the delineation and coordination phase. On one hand, as expected by the central authority, local government metamorphosed into an *active party-state* that places rural development at the forefront, strategically weaving non-governmental stakeholders such as businesses and villages into the fabric of centralised party-led governance.

On the other hand, Qianjiachi, which has already gained status as a star village, utilises its established connections with the party-state authority involved in rural governance. These connections endorse the bottom-up land entrustment reforms. As a result, Qianjiachi is better equipped to withstand fluctuations in the external market. In tandem, the local government, in a bid to fortify its achievements in NRRS, engages in a *de facto* political coalition with the village. Through this alliance, they jointly — albeit with limited extent — confront and navigate the external challenges posed by shifts of central MAZ policies.



## Chapter Nine: Fruit MAZ and Yangmatang Village

Yangmatang Village, which is located in the core development area of the Fruit MAZ, had consistently lagged behind in terms of development despite the elevation in administrative levels of both the MAZ and the town in which the village is situated. It was not until the distinctive migrant culture of Yangmatang caught the county government's eye, leading them to designate Yangmatang as the candidate of "Characteristic Countryside" — a flagship project spearheaded by the provincial party secretary, that it began to witness intensive investment from both government and private enterprise. Gradually thereafter, the village emerged as a local model project under the NRRS initiative.

The Yangmatang case study shows how an active party-state with robust fiscal strength can be transformed from a receiving village into an activated community. Beyond that, the early stage of its problematisation process (see critical incident 1) reveals how an 'ordinary' village — one that has not been designated as a star village by the government or lacks strong leadership (which, in reality, represents the majority) — faces development challenges, even when located in regions that are concurrently benefiting from the MAZ initiative.

### 9.1 Problematisation

#### *Critical incident 1: From prefectural-level MAZ to provincial-level Resort Zone*

In the early 2000s, Jiangsu Province introduced its own MAZ strategy. In 1997, the northern Caoqiu mountainous region of Lianyin County, where Yangmatang Village is located, was honoured as the "National-level Demonstration County for Hilly Area Development" due to its historical significance as a revolutionary base for the Red Army. Leveraging this title, the county government secured permission from Chenjun Prefecture to establish a prefectural-level MAZ, which sought to address the stark socio-economic disparities that existed between the southern and northern regions of the county.

The development of the Fruit MAZ can be segmented into two distinct phases, both of which have been dominated by the local government. The initial phase began in 2009,

and coincided with the inception of the MAZ. Initially, the progress of this zone did not garner significant attention from the local government. As articulated by the Director of Fruit MAZ (R30),

“The park had a modest outset because Lianyin county predominantly prioritised construction and manufacturing sectors, with agriculture continually perceived as an outdated capacity in need of phasing out and transformation.” (R30)

In the comprehensive plan of the MAZ, it was decided that the zone’s primary industry would be forestry and fruit-growing (i.e., tea, flower, trees, blueberry etc.). According to the chief planner of the Fruit MAZ (R31), the plan earmarked specific quotas for construction land, championed the initiation of transportation infrastructure in the hilly terrains, and posited the development strategy as "agriculture + tourism".

Having drawn up a comprehensive plan for the zone, the county government established the Caoqiu MAZ Development Company in 2011. However, this company was unable to raise funds from state-owned land profits: it was simply a semi-governmental agent that was responsible for construction work and coordinating the investment of public funds.

In 2012, a Management Committee was established as the steering group, under the direction of the county Bureau of Agriculture. This arrangement afforded very limited administrative capacity or fiscal independence. As the director of MAZ Management Committee (R30) stated, “at that time, the primary leadership and personnel of the Management Committee were essentially part-time, without any permanent staff. They were primarily temporary appointees seconded from various departments”.

In pursuit of funding to develop the MAZ, an incentive was offered in the form of low-cost land which, it was hoped, would encourage private enterprise investment. Companies investing more than 20 million were entitled to 67 hectares of land free of charge (R30). This strategy drew the attention of approximately 17 large-scale agricultural enterprises and numerous smaller firms, as indicated in Table 9.1 (Fruit MAZ Management Committee, 2020). According to the director of Fangzhisen Ecological Park (R48), the majority of these enterprises focused on planting roadside trees, flowers, and other

forestry-related pursuits as a result of the central government’s promotion of the “Garden City” programme during the 2010s.

Table 9.1 Selected private enterprises in the Fruit MAZ (Source: Author’s own)

<b>Company</b>	<b>Founding time</b>	<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Main business</b>	<b>Investment amount</b>	<b>Honour titles and</b>
<b>Fangzhisen Ecological Park</b>	2004	400 ha	Planting garden trees	30 million yuan	Provincial-level agricultural demonstration base
<b>Luyueshan Ecological Park</b>	2006	200 ha	Blueberry farming and beverage processing + noodle making	18 million yuan	Municipal-level listed leading agricultural enterprise
<b>Chunliri Agricultural Technological Development Company</b>	2006	359 ha	Tea + fruit + hotel	N/A	Provincial-level listed leading agricultural enterprise
<b>Zizhutian Ecological Agricultural Development Company</b>	2011	327 ha	Chinese bonsai gardening + tea	20 million yuan	/
<b>Tianyuanzhi Ecological Park</b>	2013	133 ha	Tea + fruit base + hotel	50 million yuan	/

The second phase of the development of the Fruit MAZ began in 2014 when the area was designated a “Four-star Rural Tourism Zone” under the “Tourism and Resort Zone” programme of the Jiangsu Provincial Government. Responding to this higher-level directive, the Lianyin government established a bespoke Leading Group which was chaired by the county mayor and tasked with promoting the Resort Zone programme (R30). A 5,000-hectare Resort Zone was planned within the boundary of the MAZ in 2016 (R30). To ensure administrative consistency, the MAZ Management Committee was

directly transitioned to become the Management Committee of the Resort Zone<sup>27</sup>. In the same year, Xingshang Town as a whole, was elevated to the status of a Provincial-level Economic Development Zone. As a result, the town subsequently benefitted from preferential policies and greater discretion in both administrative and financial matters.

These spatial rescaling policies extended more administrative power, fiscal independency, and discretionary power in land-use management to the MAZ Management Committee, and ultimately promoted the development of rural areas within the zone. According to the Director of the MAZ Management Committee (R30), between 2017 and 2018, an area exceeding 500 hectares of basic farmland, which had previously been restricted from non-agricultural use, was expropriated and converted by the town government into construction land through revisions to statutory land-use planning (Lianyin County Government, 2018).

Moreover, following the MAZ's designation as a "Provincial-level Tourism and Resort Zone" in 2018, the administrative level of the Management Committee was upgraded from town/section level to deputy county/division level. This promotion granted the committee an independent fiscal budget and eight leadership-level positions for civil servants (R30). Additionally, and according to the vice general manager of Caoqiu Tourism Development Company (R34), in the same year, Xingshang Town government established the Jiangsu Zhongyuan Industrial Development Corporation as a LGFV. This corporation, in turn, inaugurated the Caoqiu Tourism Development Company which shouldered the majority of financial outlays associated with the Fruit MAZ. The vice general manager articulated:

"Over the past decade (2010s-2020s), the cumulative public commitment to the Fruit MAZ stands at an approximate 3 billion yuan, predominantly earmarked for infrastructural advancements encompassing tourist-centric roads, expansive parks, reception centres, potable water storage installations, wastewater management systems, and vehicular accommodations [...] In recent years, the Caoqiu Tourism Development Company's annual fiscal allocation to the MAZ has consistently oscillated between 30 and 40 million yuan" (R34).

---

<sup>27</sup> To avoid confusion for readers due to changes in nomenclature, and given that both management committees consist of the same personnel (one institution, two hats, see section 2.1) with both zones targeting agricultural tourism, this study will continue to use "Fruit MAZ" to refer to the "Resort Zone".

The enhancement of the environment through public investment has attracted, primarily from the real estate and tourism sectors, a significant influx of large capital into the rural area where the MAZ is located (as seen in Table 9.2). One of the largest investments in the zone was made by Hejian, a domestic real estate giant. Through an investment of 28 billion yuan, they developed a multifaceted recreational complex, which encompasses residential apartments, countryside resorts, and conference centres (Lianyin County Government, 2020). This project alone utilised roughly 20% of the available land within the MAZ. The director of the MAZ committee (R30) reported that, in 2021, the zone witnessed an influx of approximately 3.53 million visitors; generating an annual revenue nearing 267 million yuan.

Table 9.2 Examples of recent private investment projects in MAZ

Name of project	Time	Investor	Scale	Investment amount
<b>Hejian Future City</b>	2018	Hejian China Holdings Ltd.	933.3 ha	28 billion yuan
<b>Sunhill Resort Restaurant</b>	2018	New Horizon Tech Group	39.6 ha	1 billion yuan <sup>28</sup>
<b>Flower Valley Resort Area</b>	2020	Phoenix Tourism Holding Group	69.2 ha	1 billion yuan
<b>Peaceful Grove Eco-Tourism Village</b>	2021	Terra Construction Group	65 ha	1 billion yuan
<b>Greenwood Lakeside Campsite</b>	2023	Greenwood Group	87 ha	1 billion yuan

However, the development of the MAZ has had a limited impact on the socio-economic advancement of Yangmatang village. In the initial phase, the topographical challenges presented by the hills in Yangmatang made large-scale farming endeavours impractical. In the subsequent phase, and despite administrative upgrades of the MAZ Management Committee and the town government which allowed the MAZ to acquire more land and attract large amount of extra-local capital, the development activities were primarily concentrated in the plains surrounding Yangmatang. As stated by the village party secretary (R35),

“(While) Yangmatang has always been at the core of the park [...] its unfavourable geographical conditions and relatively isolated transportation

<sup>28</sup> The reason for the figures here all being 1 billion yuan is because MAZ was promoting a “1 billion tourism investment campaign” at the time. Hence, in the statistics, the final figure is always 1 billion. However, as for whether the actual investment reached this amount, the local officials simply said it was approximately that amount.

make development challenging and costly [...] Private enterprises have been hesitant to invest (in Yangmatang) [...] The bustling developments seen in the surrounding areas have had limited influence on our growth [...] (However), I personally believe this might be a deliberate strategy by the government, reserving this area for its own development plans rather than letting private enterprises embark on random projects”.

According to village records, the average personal income in Yangmatang was less than 20,000 yuan per year in 2017, which was lower than the provincial average, and contributed to severe depopulation (Shengxiang Village Committee, 2020). The village party secretary (R35) recalled that:

“Before 2017, the entire Shengxiang Village (including Yangmatang) was a typical 'ghost village' and 'hollowed-out village' [...] Shengxiang village was the targeted assistance unit of the county Bureau of Urban Management [...] I myself was elected village secretary in 2004, and at that time, the village committee's collective economic account was still in debt by nearly 400,000 yuan”.

### *Critical incident 2: Designation as a candidate of the “Characteristic Countryside”*

The problematisation process of Yangmatang’s development was mainly initiated in 2017, when the village was nominated as the candidate village for the “Characteristic Countryside” Programme. Championed by the provincial party secretary, this programme was as a keystone policy in local rural revitalisation. Its core objective was to identify marginal villages and transform them into demonstrative models of socialist bucolic rural life.

This programme of “Characteristic Countryside” anchored on fostering an *active party-state* via a top-down institutional design, which would cascade from provincial to county-level administrations. To ensure meticulous implementation, the provincial government inaugurated the “Joint Conference on Characteristic Countryside Construction”, an inter-departmental system of collaboration which united the representatives from 17 departments (R33). Presided over by a deputy provincial governor, this consortium was entrusted with the task of synergising fiscal and bureaucratic resources. Concurrently, the

provincial Department of Construction commissioned a specialised office to synchronize pertinent administrative tasks, and further buttressed their efforts by generating technical manuals, planning directives, and building codes (R33).

Emulating these efforts, the Chenjun government instituted analogous structures to advocate for the programme's objectives at the prefectural level. A deputy prefecture mayor was designated to steer this initiative. Highlighting the significance of this programme, this high-ranking official made 22 documented visits to Yangmatang, as corroborated by the village party secretary (R35).

At the county level, Yangmatang was selected as one of the candidate villages — due, in part, to its distinct Zhejiang migrant socio-cultural characteristics,<sup>29</sup> The “Characteristic Countryside” programme was subsequently listed as one of the key annual governmental works, and a county-level Joint Conference system was established, which was chaired by both the county party secretary and the county mayor (Lianyin County Government, 2017). According to the deputy director of county Bureau of Construction (R33), four *ad hoc* action groups, led by the heads of relevant local bureaus - construction, agriculture, planning, and transport - were formed to coordinate vertical administrative affairs with horizontal town governments and village committees. Each pilot village was paired with a county government leader whose performance evaluation was thereafter tied to the progress of the programme and the socio-economic achievements of the village (R33). The core leaders of town governments were tasked with visiting the selected villages monthly, or even weekly, depending on the progress of development (R32). Progress reports from each pilot village had to be submitted to the county-level “Joint Conference” every fortnight (R32).

In addition, the county established an independent *ad hoc* office, the “Countryside office”, within the Bureau of Construction to navigate administrative obstacles to rural

---

<sup>29</sup> Yangmatang was originally established by a group of immigrants from Zhejiang province over one century ago (specific hometown details have been omitted to ensure privacy). As a result, higher-level government authorities perceived the village as possessing distinct cultural and architectural features. However, upon field investigation and visits to the village history museum, the author observed that such distinctive attributes had been assimilated over the long course of history and were not particularly pronounced amidst the impacts of urbanisation.

development, such as basic farmland conservation, fragmented farmland and its rearrangement, statutory land-use planning, zoning regulation, and bridging local communities with research institutes focused on agriculture and architectural design (R33). Each candidate village was assigned an experienced middle-level official from the "Countryside office" who worked on-site with the aim of accelerating construction (R33). Technical service teams were also provided by the office for rural housing design, infrastructure engineering, and courtyard renewal (R33).

As a result of the Characteristic Countryside programme, Yangmatang received unprecedented linking relational resources from the state, including several major state-sponsored regeneration projects which were implemented from 2017 onwards and sought to improve local road infrastructure, the built environment, and the natural environment. The result of the same was a development surge. According to the village party secretary (R35), the entire regeneration programme was completed within just eight months.

The development of Yangmatang was primarily financed by the LGFVs. In 2018, the Jiangsu Zhongyuan Industrial Development Corporation and a LGFV of another high-level economic zone within Lianyin co-established the Yangmatang Investment and Development Company (YIDC). As stated by the village party secretary (R35), — who was appointed as the president of YIDC — this village-level<sup>30</sup> state-owned development corporation was responsible for land expropriation, contract management, property development, and the everyday operational affairs of the village. This top-down power structure also highlights the passive features of Yangmatang as a receiving village. The general manager of YIDC was an official from the town government, and two on-site vice general managers were, respectively, a senior manager from the Zhongyuan Industrial Development Corporation and a deputy secretary to the Yangmatang Village (R35). In the words of the village party secretary, the YIDC was, in reality, managed by the town official. He remarked,

---

<sup>30</sup> Usually, state-owned enterprises are not established at a village level, as villages are not formal government fiscal units in the current social governance system.



“My role, along with that of the deputy secretary, primarily involved coordinating various construction projects, mobilizing the masses, and deliberating on tasks related to residential land development. Our primary responsibility was to ensure effective coordination and implementation” (R35).

The close involvement of these LGFVs resulted in extra fiscal resources for rural development beyond the formal governmental budget. The total amount of state investment in Yangmatang has not been officially calculated due to political sensitivity. The deputy director of Bureau of Construction (R33) estimated that it could have exceeded 300 million yuan, while the manager of the Caoqiu Tourism Development Company (R34) implied that the direct investment had been over 400-500 million yuan. For context, it is essential to mention that the total public budgetary revenue of Xingshang Town stood at a mere 320 million yuan in 2022 (Lianyin Economic Development Zone, 2023).

Being successfully nominated as “Characteristic Countryside” led to greater support from government actors for the development of Yangmatang. The director of the Fruit MAZ was assigned the role of first secretary<sup>31</sup> of the village. According to him,

“At that time, in response to the call from the central party committee, more than 40 first secretaries were selected throughout the city [...] The actual main task of this job is to connect resources, aligning projects and relationships of one's own affiliated organisation (i.e., governmental department, enterprise etc.) with the targeted village [...] Different development processes require different resources. After we MAZ introduced some infrastructure projects into the park, the role of first secretary was handed over to a ‘resident village planner’ from the Provincial Planning and Design Institute, letting their team of experts be responsible for the specific construction work of the village” (R30).

At the same time, some well-educated young officials (i.e., civil servants in the fast stream) from prefectural- and county-level departments were regularly assigned as deputy party secretaries of Yangmatang (R30). These temporary secretaries used their administrative

---

<sup>31</sup> For details, see Appendix A

authority and personal networks to help the village committee with regards to both land expropriation and attracting further investment. As the village party secretary (R35) said,

“Just like you doctors (i.e., he actually means researchers from universities) who come here for investigation, these ‘new secretaries’ are the future talents/leaders in government. Coming to our village is an opportunity for them to hone their skills and enhance their resumes, and we are well aware of that [...] In return, your research that can publicize Yangmatang's experiences greatly benefit us. As I often say, one (academic) paper overwhelms ten government reports [...] These new secretaries also bring vitality to our village committee and provide substantial assistance in terms of resources [...] and relationships”.

Additionally, the county Bureau of Urban Management allocated 3 million yuan towards the construction of a greenhouse in Yangmatang, which subsequently generated approximately 80 employment opportunities (R35). The YIDC retained 30% of the revenue from the greenhouse by becoming a shareholder. As a means of supporting the village, the Bureau of Urban Management agreed a contract to purchase flowers from this greenhouse at a rate that was double the prevailing market price. This bolstered the annual revenue of the greenhouse to an estimated 300,000 yuan. Furthermore, since the nomination as “Characteristic Countryside”, the MAZ has been the recipient of more programmes and public financial resources. Subsidies to the zone between 2018 and 2020 exceeded 100 million yuan, and these were mainly intended to leverage private investment to the rural hinterland according to the director of the MAZ (R30).

## **9.2 Expression of interest**

### *Critical incident 3: Development of Caoqiuhuazhu Hotel*

In 2017, Yangmatang became a designated Characteristic Countryside. Following this, the county government's policy to attract investment led to a significant development. The Caoqiuhuazhu Hotel, an extra-local enterprise, invested over 60 million yuan in building a boutique hotel cluster in Yangmatang (see Figure 9.1). This investment created approximately 100 job positions. The village party secretary (R35) remarked, “The owner of Caoqiuhuazhu is a quite capable lady. Having grown up in a military dependents’

residential compound, she possesses a broad perspective and quickly recognised the development potential of our village”.



Figure 9.1 Caoqiuhezhu Hotels (Source: Author's own)

After settling in Yangmatang, Caoqiuhezhu introduced new technologies and ideas to transform the village's lagging agricultural economy. The hotel manager (R49) said,

"When we first arrived in the first year, we spent over 6 million yuan in the first five months to purchase agricultural products from Shengxiang Village [...] This is also our way of supporting rural revitalisation. Later, we found that although it can satisfy the general dishes of agritainment, it lacked local characteristics and market appeal”.

Upon learning that the immigrants in Yangmatang village had brought with them skills pertaining to sweet potato cultivation and that they had previously transformed the village into a major regional sweet potato production area, Caoqiuhezhu facilitated a collaboration between the Jiangsu Provincial Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Yangmatang (R49). With the assistance of the village committee, the academy leased 6 hectares of land from the rural households, and established a sweet potato seeding base to cultivate new varieties with improved taste profiles. The seeding base employed about 150 people in Shengxiang Village, and the average annual income of the local employees was about 42,000 yuan (R35). As a local sweet potato farmer who is also working in the sweet potato base (R40) said,

“A 0.067-hectare (=1 Chinese mu) plot can produce around 2000 kilogram of sweet potatoes, and it was considered pretty good if we can sell them for 0.2 yuan per kg. Those that we can't sell are sun-dried into sweet potato grains to be used as feed. When you subtract the costs of seedlings, fertilizer, and labour, there was hardly any profit. But now these new varieties can be sold for over five yuan each kilogram! [...] these new varieties are quite delicate. The vines they produce have a different colour – they're redder and only have half the diameter of the older types. They can break easily if you're not careful, and any excess roots have to be removed promptly; otherwise, the resulting sweet potatoes won't taste good. So, we received training from the experts to learn how to plant them [...] My monthly income is about 3000 yuan now”.

Furthermore, and by leveraging the investment from the YIDC, Caoqiuhezhu tapped into its extensive social networks to entice additional extra-local agribusiness players. Through so doing it fostered the development of several distinct local delicacies, such as wines, snacks, and desserts - all of which are derived from sweet potatoes (Figure 9.2). Impressively, even amidst the pandemic, the sales of these sweet potato products exceeded 2.6 million yuan (R49). The manager of Caoqiuhezhu (R49) stated,

“To put it without exaggeration, we have become the steward of the new rural economy (i.e., creative economy) of Shengxiang Village [...] Every household brings their free-range chicken eggs and freshly harvested yams from the fields to sell to us [...] It's not just Yangmatang; 19 surrounding natural villages no longer have to worry about selling their local special products, and they can sell them at a good price (through Caoqiuhezhu)”.

In recognition of these achievements, in 2021, the president of Caoshanhuaju was nominated as a commissioner of the prefectural CPPCC and for the leadership role of multiple county-level business associations, such as Lianyin Female Entrepreneur Association, and the Lianyin Bed and Breakfast Hotel Association (R49).



Figure 9.2 Sweet potato products: From left to right, they are sweet potato beer, sweet potato biscuits, and sweet potato *shaojiu* liquor (Source: Author's own).

It is worthwhile noting that, in ensuring the successful establishment of the Caoqiuhezhu Hotel, the local government agencies, as they evolved into an active party-state, took decisive steps to advance rural land property rights reforms. This strategic move sought to circumvent the constraints placed by the urban-rural dual land system on the hotel's utilisation of rural homesteads. To support the construction, the county government engaged leading planning and design institutes to produce a customised comprehensive plan for the village which reserved rural construction land for the hotel and other future development projects by removing existing rural homesteads (R33).

Capitalising on the central government's Land Rights Separation Reform in 2013 (for details, see Appendix A), the county party secretary took a bold step by personally endorsing a policy. This policy permitted the transfer of full rights of rural homesteads in Yangmatang, which were designated for demolition, to the YIDC. The villagers who lost their homesteads were given options: they could choose cash compensation, relocate to new apartments in the town, or rebuild their homes in other parts of the village (though with reduced floor areas) (R35). This reform simplified the process for villagers to relinquish their homestead rights, offering them the flexibility to either relocate their homesteads or return them entirely to the village collective. The collective could then lease these lands to external users. This stands in contrast to the previous approach of

formal government expropriation, which involved converting rural collectively-owned construction land into urban state-owned construction land for sale or allocation to private developers or state-owned enterprises, a process characterised by its length, high costs, and complexity. As the village party secretary (R35) remarked,

“The significance of this policy innovation is immense, breaking through several institutional constraints, (in the areas of planning and land management). One could argue that we are the Xiaogang Village<sup>32</sup> in the New Era (i.e., it is a word widely used to refer to the Xi administration) [...] Without the personal endorsement of the county committee secretary and the “red-headed document” (formal approval document) from the town government that followed, we wouldn't have dared to proceed with the homestead withdrawal [...] Land issues are incredibly sensitive in our country. If the local populace becomes dissatisfied and decides to lodge formal complaints or stage protests, the consequences would be severe for us”. (R35)

The concerns raised by the village secretary are not without merit. The land expropriation process faced resistance from rural households and, to address this, the village committee and the town government sought the support of Mr. Fang, a rural elite from Yangmatang and the party secretary of the Greenwood Group, a leading private manufacturing enterprise within the Fruit MAZ (R35). Harnessing his considerable clout within the local community, Mr. Fang was able to expedite the expropriation process through a meticulous door-to-door engagement with local households.

The success of Caoqiuhuazhu garnered the interest of other extra-local investors. For instance, the Chengche Tourism Company from Nanjing, the capital city of Jiangsu, invested 190 million yuan in the construction of a theme park focused on train and car culture, on approximately 13 hectares of land in Yangmatang (Lianyin Finance Bureau, 2021). The project was a joint venture between the MAZ and Chengche, which now hold 45% and 55% of the shares in the theme park respectively (R30). This project yields 100,000 yuan in land rental fees to the village each year and the company has promised

---

<sup>32</sup> This village is a symbol of Open Reform. In 1978, its villagers secretly signed a contract to divide the Maoist collectively-owned farmland system into de facto individual properties. The Xiaogang Village agreement is widely seen as a pioneering event that catalysed the rural reform movement in China, eventually leading to nationwide agricultural reforms and the beginning of China's transformation from a centrally-planned economy to a market-oriented one.

to gift 8% of its revenues to Yangmatang after 2023 (R35). According to the village party secretary (R35), average land rents increased from less than 6.7 yuan per hectare to 33 yuan per hectare after 2022. Additionally, the YIDC has rented local vacant houses to the MAZ and Caoqiuhuazhu Company, achieving rental yield of at least 10,000 yuan per year for each house (R35). According to the village party secretary (R35), "these rental fees are considered a welfare benefit for the villagers and are reinvested into social support".

At the same time, the rapid development of Yangmatang after the "Characteristic Countryside" has attracted a growing number of rural returnees to the village (R35). The YIDC provided 100% grants for regeneration of these returnees' homes and expenditure on essential facilities. The wine-maker, for example, was invited back to Yangmatang by the village committee and received a total investment of 600,000 yuan to redevelop his house into a wine-making workshop, purchase necessary equipment and training, and provide him with an annual rent. As a demonstrative beneficiary of the "Characteristic Countryside", the wine-maker's annual income exceeded 100,000 yuan. As he remarked,

"My ancestors have been involved in brewing, and I too enjoy a drink. However, due to life's demands, I went to the city to work as a welder. Later, when the village sought individuals for the 'one household one product' initiative, I immediately resigned and returned to make sweet potato wine [...] From 50 kilograms of sweet potatoes, after fermentation and distillation, one can produce almost 15 kilograms of wine. This is far more profitable than farming sweet potatoes [...] On busy days, we can have dozens or even hundreds of tourists [...] Our total annual sales once reached around 1 million yuan". (R36)

Moreover, people from surrounding villages came to Yangmatang for work, and in the Caoqiuhuazhu Hotel Company, for instance, 95% of the hotel management team comprised villagers from Shengxiang and nearby areas, according to the manager (R49). In addition, about 10% of local houses have been rented to extra-local actors, many of whom are employees of the Hejian Future City, the giant real estate construction project which is located nearby (R35).

As with the villages presented in the other two case studies, economic growth and diversification have further invigorated the villagers' participation in both developmental

activities and village decision-making processes. According to the interview with villagers (R36-47), the village congress meeting has been now held on a monthly basis to discuss developmental affairs with actors from various sectors, and particularly local government. In addition, the village established the “People’s Hall” group, which seeks to address people's concerns and enquiries through a focus group composed of rural elites; as noted by a village accountant, and a number of village representatives (R35). In the interview, the village party secretary proudly informed the author that about 13,000 conflicts and contradictions had been “internally digested within the village” (R30) over the previous three years, instead of their becoming formal petitions and appeals to the local state. This was seen a remarkable success for rural governance by the interviewed officials and the village director:

“In terms of governance, Yangmatang is a typical representative of our practice of the *Fengqiao* Experience<sup>33</sup>, adhering to the principle that conflicts are not escalated / ‘handed over’ (to the government)” (R30).

“At the time of Caoqiuhuazhu's construction, there were issues related to villagers' land. Villagers had different opinions on the land compensation scheme and kept "flipping over" (changing their minds) multiple times. Over a month passed, and no consensus could be reached. By that time, we had essentially formed the initial structure of the People's Hall. Elderly villagers, village representatives, and team leaders, amounting to more than thirty people, constituted the council members [...] Before starting, the village party committee set some ground rules to guide everyone to express their interests legally and reasonably: switch off mobile phones and discuss on the spot; the majority's decision would be final [...] After more than 3 hours, the relocation compensation scheme was finally approved. [...] Rural work is challenging to carry out, and in many cases, it's hard to form a unanimous opinion. We village cadres advocated organising the ‘People's Hall’ for consultations, following the people’s opinion, staying grounded, which helps solve problems without causing trouble for the government” (R35).

---

<sup>33</sup> Fengqiao Experience (枫桥经验) refers to a community-based approach for conflict resolution and social management which was initiated in the Fengqiao District of Zhuji City, Zhejiang Province, China during the 1960s. It emphasises resolving social disputes and conflicts at the community level and thereby prevents the escalation of minor issues into major ones, whilst promoting harmony in communities by relying on the local people and their self-governing organisations rather than resorting to higher formal authorities or legal procedures. This approach in the Maoist era has been re-emphasised by Xi Jinping in party-led rural governance work since 2013.



The YIDC also built an advanced village history exhibition centre with digital and visualisation technologies to evoke local collective memory and a new multi-functional village council hall for village congress meeting, community activities, job training, and cultural festivals. It was reported in interviews with villagers that bonding relationships between the cadre and community had been greatly strengthened. As the village party secretary (R35) proudly stated:

“Presently, every time I go to the village, every household welcomes me to have meal at their home [...] rarely do I receive any complaints or petitions now. You have interviewed me for such a long time, did you see anyone come in to look for me? No! If I hadn’t governed (the village) well, my office would have been swamped with people a long time ago”.

He added that the intensive engagement between village committee and village party members had been “at the vanguard” of programme implementation, and had grown into a “cohesive party work team” of about 100 people.

The socio-economic achievements and institutional innovations of Yangmatang have attracted further political attention from higher-level bureaucrats, which has resulted in increased state programme resources and the conferment of various honorary titles, including “Jiangsu Provincial Traditional Village” and “Chenjun Prefectural Key Tourism Village”. It has also received regular visits from provincial/ministerial-level officials, such as the minister of MARA and other provincial-level leaders (R35), whilst its success story has been featured in influential state-sponsored media, including the *People’s Daily*. The village secretary believes that these official media reports validate the success of the village’s development and governance. The political accolades, as mentioned by the secretary, “have earned the village more resources and greater future possibilities”, (R35). From 2018 to 2022, the average individual income in Yangmatang increased from less than 20,000 yuan per year to 30,000 yuan, and the rural collective income reported in the village work report exceeded 1.3 million yuan (Shengxiang Village Committee, 2022).

### **9.3 Delineation and coordination**

*Critical incident 4: Withdrawal of the village development corporation*

Following the five years in which the designation as “Characteristic Countryside” was gained, a developmental actor network was established in Yangmatang (Figure 9.3). From the diagram, it is evident that the network showcases the receiving village characteristics of Yangmatang. The emergence of new relationships primarily revolves linking relationships around government agencies, semi-government actors, and other party-state institutions. With the government dispatching officials to Yangmatang and establishing state-owned enterprises, it is primarily the YIDC — rather than the village committee — that serves as the bridge between the *active party-state* and the *activated community* at the grassroots level.

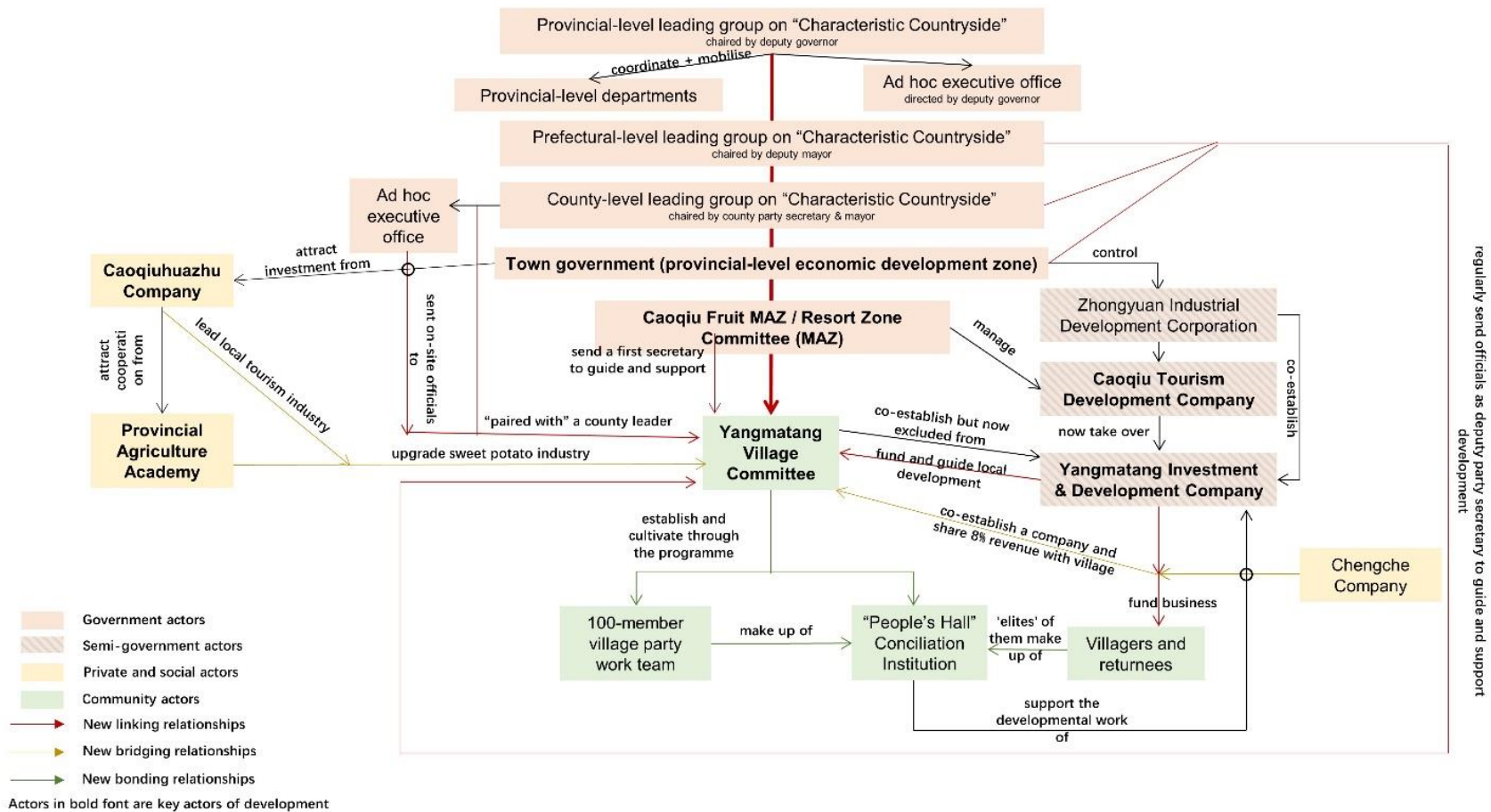


Figure 9.3 Actor network for the development of Yangmatang Village (Source: Author's own)

Following the designation of the “Characteristic Countryside”, local government intervention in the governance and development of Yangmatang has steadily increased and through so doing has ensured that this prominently inspected key village maintains a favourable physical environment. The MAZ and the town government nominally share the daily operational costs of the village and, as mentioned by the vice general manager of Caoqiu Tourism Development Company (R34), this expense amounts to approximately 2 million yuan annually, and is mainly borne by the company. Concurrently, around 40-50% of the rural homesteads in Yangmatang have been transferred to Caoqiu Tourism Development Company (R35). Currently, the company is exploring how to use these land assets as collateral to obtain loans from local state-owned banks to improve its balance sheet. This is especially important given heightened scrutiny from the central government on the debt conditions of LGFVs in recent times (R34). This prevailing financial strain has necessitated a temporary halt of the future development plans for Yangmatang village (R34).

Moreover, the operation of private tourism enterprises within the village has increasingly become, and especially since the pandemic, reliant on public subsidies. While Caoqiuhuazhu experienced some level of business continuity during the pandemic, it faced significant headwinds in offsetting its costs, primarily due to the pronounced ramifications of the “zero-Covid policy” on the tourism sector from 2022 onwards. As noted by the manager of Caoqiuhuazhu (R49), there was a notable decrease in visitor footfall; an estimated 40-50%. In light of these challenges, and to buttress such private establishments, the government has, according to the MAZ director (R30), “paid out its own pocket” to provide subsidies and tax reliefs to these enterprises. The government even took responsibility for covering the land rents that these enterprises owned to the villagers. While some state-owned enterprises both locally and from Chenjun city demonstrated an inclination towards investing in Yangmatang, the global food crisis instigated by the Russo-Ukrainian conflict prompted the central government to enact more stringent preservation measures over agricultural lands. This policy shift, inevitably, created substantial obstacles for these businesses when it came to them attempting to procure necessary land.

Furthermore, the Fruit MAZ Management Committee has reclaimed actual control over the YIDC, indicating the increasingly centralised structure of rural governance. According to the village secretary (R35), there are no village officials left in the YIDC's management, and he himself resigned from the position of president shortly after the designation of the “Characteristic Countryside”. The village secretary personally expressed satisfaction with this arrangement, remarking, "Given my limited educational background, managing a village is feasible for me, but running an enterprise isn't. Now that the programme (Characteristic Countryside) has been implemented and the village is developing, it's appropriate for the government to reclaim the president position. After all, it was just a titular role for me”.

However, this centralisation of power would still diminish the capacity of local villagers to negotiate effectively with the government. This has resulted in a degree of resentment among villagers towards the government. For instance, a rural returnee who is a bee-keeper stated that he has been prohibited from setting up a stall near the road by officials, in order to maintain a “tidy and clean environment for spot checks by higher-up government” (R42).

Additionally, during the construction of “Characteristic Countryside”, villagers were allowed to renovate their houses on their own, with the government providing the necessary funds for reconstruction. After achieving the designation, many villagers still wished to undertake renovations, but the government had withdrawn this planning exemption. The village party secretary (R35) mentioned that getting approval for rural housing renovations would now take at least 2-3 years, and even his own house could not be refurbished. These bureaucratic hurdles have curtailed the endogenous developmental momentum within the village.

The vice general manager of the Caoqiu Tourism Development Company (R34), who was once a village party secretary and an agri-business entrepreneur, critiqued the development of Yangmatang as an inherently fragile and unsustainable ‘bonsai project’, and branded it as mere “state-sponsored, superficial agribusiness”. He opined:

“To put it bluntly, such investments barely scratch the surface of true significance. What does the rural truly need? It demands business and employment! [...] The output and dimension of local sweet potato plantation is negligible, with only a handful persisting at the production base. The primary materials for the village's sweet potato processing products are sourced from Shaanxi (a province in Western China), which does not foster local employment in any way. It (sweet potato) is not an industry at all!

An absence of industry signifies a lack of employment and vitality. And without vitality, the concept of rural revitalisation remains hollow rhetoric. How many among the local populace continue to cultivate sweet potatoes? Only agriculture that can create a large number of jobs can revitalise rural socio-economic vitality! [...] Such endeavours with sweet potatoes and recreational tourism merely serve as facades during governmental assessments and visits, becoming mere an instrument for political posturing [...] I had previously suggested the establishment of an osmanthus planting base to genuinely boost employment, but the idea eventually fizzled out [...] After all, agriculture and rural development are still not given the emphasis they deserve. As for Yangmatang village, it seems to be just a spectacle of government”.

He further remarked,

"In comparison to Yangmatang, there exist villages in dire need of compensation that are overlooked in terms of development. The development of our county commenced with quarrying. For villages with quarries, life is a daunting challenge — they grapple with mudslides following rains and sporadic threats of falling rocks. The environmental degradation is palpable [...] If these villages aren't extended support or compensation, I deem it to be a grave injustice”.

Consequently, it can be observed that, as the private sector and communities increasingly rely on the government, the government's capacity for intervention has also grown, particularly for communities with limited bargaining power. Land ownership and the discourse of daily governance in Yangmatang have become increasingly centralised in the hands of the MAZ and town government. Rural residents, who have constitutionally guaranteed autonomy, have gradually ceded control over their living environment and governance agenda to the government. This shift is due to the fact that government officials derive their power from the authorisation and performance evaluation of higher-level authorities rather than popular elections. As a result, the development vision of demonstrative villages like Yangmatang, including choices in industry and environmental

aesthetics, primarily serves as a 'performance' for local governments towards higher-level authorities, deviating from the genuine needs of local residents.

#### **9.4 Summary**

Yangmatang is a quintessential receiving village. It can be argued that it was through governmental intervention that this village was transformed from, to quote the village committee's (2022) summary report "an obscure village nestled in the hills" into "a widely renowned internet-famous village". Despite its location in the core development area of the MAZ, Yangmatang did not receive significant benefits from MAZ's upgrade to a provincial-level tourist resort, or from inward investment. Instead, the village's true prosperity came from the "Characteristic Countryside" designation, a local initiative which was undertaken under the auspices of the NRRS and promoted directly by the provincial party secretary. This programme enabled Yangmatang to leverage its unique immigrant culture and the resultant sweet potato industry (notwithstanding its limitations) to stand out from other villages, regardless of the MAZ's industrial positioning in the fruit and forestry economy.

It is worth acknowledging that during the execution of the "Characteristic Countryside" programme, a commendable and audacious social innovation between the local government, the community, and private investors merged. Initiatives such as the pilot policy for villagers to withdraw from the collective land were aligned with the genuine interests and needs of local residents who had been mostly urbanised.

However, these innovations seemingly dissipated with the conclusion of the programme. All challenges brought by the current institutional arrangement of rural governance — such as the urban-rural dual land system and a highly centralised bureaucratic system — were ostensibly terminated. What followed was a swift reclamation of power by the local government, coupled with further regulation / discipline of villagers' daily lives. The dominant role of the party-state in rural development has suffocated the endogenous forces driving development. This was evident not only in the relatively passive role of village cadres in the development and relocation efforts of the "Characteristic

Countryside", but also in the day-to-day governance and lifeworld of the village. In other words, the party-state's building of an activated community in Yangmatang, while providing rural households with participation skills and institutional opportunities, has ultimately led to a more controlled and less autonomous community. The village has, to a large extent, been operated akin to a scenic spot primarily catering to higher governmental echelons and tourists.

Such an operational mechanism also imposes a considerable financial burden on local government. Once the village attains designation status, the responsibility for its maintenance, and even the viability of private enterprises within, falls squarely on local government's shoulders. The local LGFV, as the primary investor, under the strain of tightening finances, reverts to the land finance institution (see section 3.1) of traditional Chinese urban growth machine. This to financialise rural land assets in exchange for loans to temporarily bridge debt gaps. However, this growth model, anchored in land-financed debt, has become increasingly untenable in recent years. Indeed, this is the macroeconomic context in which the NRRS was proposed. This strategic shift was explicitly intended to alter the social governance mechanism centred on land-driven growth (see Section 5.1). However, the case of Yangmatang village seems to suggest that, when confronted with local governments accustomed to debt and growth, NRRS and NED might still be ensnared within the governance framework of the Chinese growth machine.

Furthermore, the criticisms from the vice general manager of the Caoqiu Tourism Development Company highlight that the spatial pattern of socio-economic advancement brought about by NED is concentrated, rather than diffused. Such an outcome should be anticipated, given that even affluent local governments like Lianyin cannot feasibly invest such significant amounts in every village.

In summary, for a receiving village like Yangmatang, the current approach of NED has exacerbated its reliance on public inward investment and preferential policies, which are accompanied by intensive governmental interventions in the everyday governance and collective land property right of the communities.



## Chapter Ten: Discussion. Practical Mechanism and Outcomes of NED

As discussed in Chapter Three, China's post-Open Reform era has been characterised by a centralisation of party state bureaucracy and fiscal control, balanced by a tendency for local governments to form coalitions with developers, thereby creating an urban growth machine. This machine leverages state-owned land as collateral to generate significant capital, subsidises industrial exports and subsequently helps to secure China's competitive position in global markets. However, this growth machine has marginalised rural areas within the political-economic framework, rendering them as mere resource pools for urban-industrial development.

Amid concerns over the recent internal economic downturn and external political-economic shocks, the Xi administration has introduced the NRRS; a networked paradigm for rural development in China. The strategy endeavours to challenge the existing urban growth machine through the construction of *active party-state* and *activated community*. To this end, the strategy engenders a synergy of top-down administrative mobilisation with pluralistic local engagement, all under the aegis of party organisations. Such an amalgamation delineates the governance structure inherent in the NED approach. Nevertheless, this research reveals that the practice of NED is replete with dynamics, particularly in Chinese rural localities characterised by differentiated governance features.

In order to conceptualise the NED, this chapter synthesises the principal findings of the study, shedding light on the practical mechanism and dynamics of NED in rural China. This chapter is organised into three sections. Section 10.1 aims to answer the sub-research question: "what is NED?" Based on the case studies and the NRRS policy framework, it identifies the common practical mechanism (structure) of NED. In the sectional summary, the variances in implementation mechanisms (agency) across three types of villages are also delineated, though the differences were found to be limited.

Section 10.2 answers the sub-research question: "Can NED sustainably advance rural households' socio-economic well-being and effectively address China's rural marginalisation?" It scrutinises the impacts of NED on the (re-)production of social relationships and its materialisation, focusing on the four key actors which constitute the

new rural governance structure under the Xi administration: party-state government, rural party organisations, rural households, and extra-local private enterprises.

### 10.1 Practical mechanism of NED

Within Chapters Seven to Nine, this thesis presented a critical examination of the delivery and subsequent impact of the MAZ programme on the development of three distinct villages. Despite the dynamics, the study revealed that the approaches towards the *active party-state* and *activated community* displayed significant similarities across the regions and cases. These commonalities served as cues, which led the author to unveil the practical mechanisms inherent in the NED approach. **In short, this thesis argues that NED, in practice, is a party-led approach that is aimed towards a multi-scalar and cross-sectoral collaborative innovation process.** The mechanisms are identified as follows:

#### - **Active-party state**

##### *(1) Political mobilisation*

In each of the three case studies, it is evident that the formation of the *active party-state* originated from political mobilisation initiated at the local government level (i.e., county government). However, the ultimate legitimacy of this mobilisation was predicated on authorisation from higher-level authorities. The initiation of the NRRS as a central policy strategy serves as a manifestation of this political authorisation for local government involvement in rural development agendas. In the context of Lanjing Village, the legitimacy of the political mobilisation emanated from specific directives promulgated by the provincial party secretary during a visit. Similarly, in Qianjiachi Village, what began as a county-level initiative for orange industry development gained further policy traction following the designation of Yangmatang Village as a “Liaison Village” by the CLGRW. In Yangmatang Village, the political mobilisation emanated from the top-down mandate related to the development of “Characteristic Countryside” that was issued by the provincial party secretary. Therefore, while political mobilisation has augmented the local discretion, agency, and flexibility of local governments and rural communities in rural

development and governance process, it has not challenged the central party-state's ability to integrate and control its local subordinates and rural areas. On the contrary, it has served to strengthen it.

The efficacy of such mobilisation is magnified by China's unique party-state structure. In all three cases, county governments formulated *ad hoc* high-level leadership groups (i.e., Leading Group and Joint Conference) affiliated with county party committees as a strategy by which to overcome bureaucratic hurdles within local state agencies. This *ad hoc* institutional arrangement not only operates alongside the existing conventional rural governance system, but also establishes an alternative, more flexible operational structure centred around local party leaders' mandates. It assumes governance functions traditionally undertaken by formal state bureaucratic organisation and, consequently, concentrates resources across county-level party-state organs to expedite the execution of rural development programmes prioritised by higher authorities.

Additionally, owing to the presence of party committees within universities, research organisations, and state-owned enterprises — all recipients of public funds — this political mobilisation also extends to these non-governmental entities. As a result, a considerable array of professional expertise, extra-governmental budget, and specialised services can be mobilised for rural development, making NRRS a societal common concern. In all three case studies, active involvement from local agricultural research institutes, universities, state-owned financial institutions (e.g., banks, insurance companies etc.), and LGFVs in the implementation of the NRRS is evident. The institutional foundation for this state mobilisation spreading to society is rooted in the proportional advantage that state-owned socio-economic organisations hold over private enterprises and civil society with regards to social governance and economic structure. Consequently, the party-state government can swiftly redirect socio-economic resources from urban to rural areas, thereby elevating rural development to the status of a “societal concern”.

By doing so, political mobilisation can succeed in — at least temporarily — reconfiguring the governance agendas of all local party-state organs, challenging the prevailing urban

growth machine and elevates rural development to the status of a significant political imperative.

## *(2) Party-state legislation and regulation*

Through the NRRS framework, the central party state has enacted legislative reforms in various domains, including criteria for official promotions, disciplinary scopes for party members and officials, and land tenure systems. These reforms effectively extend the ‘whip’ of the central party committee, and allow it to intervene substantively in governance and developmental matters through the control of officials’ promotion from the central to the community level.

At the local level, while the county-level governments lack formal legislative authority, China’s party-state institution — which has gained more power over the ‘rule of law’ under the Xi administration<sup>34</sup> — accords significant latitude to formal and informal administrative edicts issued by local authorities. Utilising the party’s unassailable leadership position within local governments and the judicial system, local party leaders remain largely unencumbered by formal bureaucratic checks and balances when it comes to making or breaking regulations. Moreover, the political mobilisation of NRRS affords local governments the latitude to informally circumvent existing regulations and administrative constraints. For instance, the directives on local land reform by the party secretary of Lianyin County served as a crucial means of deregulating rural homesteads for developmental purposes.

Furthermore, the case studies reveal that county party committees can tailor performance evaluation and reward-punishment regulations for officials based on local development

---

<sup>34</sup> This phenomenon has become increasingly pronounced under the governance of Xi, as central authorities have explicitly mandated that the judicial system should be subordinate to the leadership of the CPC (for details, see Horsley, 2019). The most salient example is the revised draft of the Public Security Administration Punishment Law of China which was issued in September 2023. Key provisions, such as Article 2, Sections 2 and 3 of Article 34, and Article 100, have devolved considerable authority and discretion for administrative sanctions against citizens to county-level governments and agencies. Moreover, the revisions introduce a range of ambiguously defined offenses, colloquially termed ‘pocket crimes,’ that grant governmental bodies significant latitude for interpretation and enforcement. (For more information, please see <http://www.npc.gov.cn/flcaw/userIndex.html?lid=ff8081818a22132f018a499710595932>)

conditions and industrial characteristics. This customisation incentivises lower-level officials and cadres to implement the upper-level policy objectives both effectively and flexibly. The case study from Qianjiachi revealed that more flexible and lenient performance evaluations have augmented officials' tolerance for endogenous innovations undertaken by rural communities and other non-governmental entities. Hence, within the framework of the party-state system, the introduction of the NRRS as a central policy directive effectively compels local governments to launch radical institutional arrangements to rapidly realign their development and governance agendas, towards rural socio-economic advancement.

### *(3) Rescaling*

Under the prevailing system of administrative-led resource allocation, rural areas often find it challenging to secure fiscal and political resources due to their low administrative rank. To address this issue, several rescaling measures are initiated by the local governments, including establishing bespoke governmental authorities such as Leading Groups and MAZ Management Committees, delineating special zones such as MAZs, and designating villages with high-level honours such as “Provincial-level Characteristic Countryside”, in order to upscale the local rural development and facilitate programme implementation. It can be found that these measures derive from the toolkit of Chinese party-state governance institution (see Section 3.1-(2)) where the party committees obtain dominant role in leading and restructuring the financial and institutional arrangement within local party-state bureaucracy. For instance, the bespoke authorities set by the party committees often possess independent fiscal budgets and headcounts, depending upon the level of political support for the (given) programme. This enables targeted rural areas to quickly benefit from public investment.

Additionally, local governments can enhance the political influence and coordination capacity of these bespoke rural authorities within the broader governmental structure through strategic personnel arrangements. For instance, in the case of the Bamboo MAZ, the director of the MAZ Management Committee also served as the executive officer of the county-level Leading Group and was a party group member of both the Bureau of

Forestry and the Bureau of Natural Resources. These multiple 'hats' provided the MAZ with leverage to engage in top-level communication and coordination with these two bureaus via the party group channel.

While such rescaling efforts, through area-based initiatives, are ostensibly regional, their catalytic impacts are often more nodal, and restricted to the few 'star villages' that have been prioritised by upper-level government. Under top-down evaluation mechanisms, it is more economical and strategically prudent for local governments to concentrate fiscal resources on showcase projects rather than dispersing them across various sectors. This is particularly true when it comes to deeply-marginal areas that require substantial investment without the guarantee of immediate and discernible returns. A case in point is Yangmatang Village. Although its corresponding MAZ and township underwent multiple rounds of rescaling, the village only began to receive substantial public investment after its designation as a "Characteristic Countryside".

#### *(4) Programme-based financial support*

The economic foundation for the aforementioned institutional changes and development policies stems from the programme-based financial system, which has been gradually established since the initiation of the NSCC. A salient feature of the emerging NRRS is the reorientation of LGFVs from urban expansion towards rural development; enabled by top-down party-led political mobilisation. Local governments monetise the future expected returns from urban state-owned construction land through collateralised loans from local state-owned banks, and through so doing subsidise rural development activities. Via these rural-oriented LGFVs, wealth is being incrementally transferred from urban to rural settings.

From the perspective of economic geography, and coupled with burgeoning rural tourism and modern agriculture, this urban-to-rural wealth and amenity migration can be interpreted as a common form of spatial fix. However, the state-led nature of these initiatives raises questions about financial sustainability. Apart from Qianjiachi Village, which has developed a profitable orange industry, the other two communities have not

demonstrated compelling revenue models to either support self-sustained development or cover LGFV financial shortfalls. In the Yangmatang case, the LGFV is exploring ways to balance its books by leveraging the transferred homestead land use rights for new collateralised loans. This undoubtedly risks the financialisation of rural land and subtly undermines the community’s control over local resources, constraining the endogeneity of NED development.

In summary, the active party-statecraft generated under the NRRS framework can be decomposed into four elements, including political mobilisation, party-state legislation and regulation, rescaling and programme-based finance. Table 10.1 illustrates the practical mechanism of this party-statecraft to challenge the urban growth machine and promote rural development. The table also provides some selected central governmental policies of each element to connect the practical mechanism of NED with the NRRS policy framework discussed in Section 5.1.

Table 10.1 The practical mechanism of active party-state of NED and corresponding central policies (Source: Author’s own)

		<b>Elements</b>	<b>Selected central-level policies</b>	<b>Mechanism in detail</b>
<b>Active state</b>	<b>party-</b>	<b>Political mobilisation</b>	No.1 Circular of Central CPC Committee since 2018	Identify the strategic position of rural development in the work of party-state authorities of all levels, challenging the urban growth machine.  Act as political endowment to enable local party-state leaders to innovate in formal/informal institutions that underpin rural development.
		<b>Party-state legislation</b>	Regulations of the CPC on Rural Work;  Law on Promoting Rural Revitalisation  Implementation Measures for the Rural Revitalisation Responsibility System	Identify the legal responsibilities and establish new performance evaluation systems for party-state agencies at all levels in promoting rural development, and stipulate supportive measures.

	Public Servants Administrative Sanctions Law	
<b>Rescaling</b>	2018 Governmental Institutional Reform;  Area-based initiatives by various zone-making plans	Level up the political weight of rural-related authorities and affairs.  Endow rural authorities with more administrative authority and financial discretion through spatial rescaling policies.
<b>Programme-based financing</b>	Opinion of the Ministry of Finance on the Implementation of the Rural Revitalisation Strategy 2018;  The National Rural Revitalisation Strategic Plan (2018-2022)	Enhance the transfer payment to rural areas through centrally-designed programmes.

## - Activated community

### (5) *Party-building*

An activated community is constructed through the dynamic interactions that occur between the active party-state and the (given) community. This construction of active community is featured by intensive rural party-building initiatives, which have afforded the government the latitude to mobilise non-governmental actors including local communities and private sectors. Within the NED model, party-building has manifested in three primary approaches:

First, local party-state governments expand their influence into local private enterprises through the establishment of party branches (e.g., Orange MAZ) and the deployment of party cadres (e.g., Bamboo MAZ). According to the interviews with the MAZ officials, this enables them to obtain effective comprehension of the enterprise's requisites for rural development and facilitates targeted assistance. However, as found from the case studies, this party-building in private sectors can also engender a dependency within the enterprises on financial subsidies, policy incentives, and predictably, ideological



alignment. Through it, the party-state can enhance its integration of private sectors, the market force, in the rural.

Second, leveraging the One Shoulder Pole Reform (see Appendix A), the authority of village party secretaries, appointed by the government, is augmented in local governance. Concurrently, grassroots party organisational reforms are enacted to replace underperforming, aged, or corrupt local cadres with younger, better-educated, and competent party members. Complementary policies are instituted to encourage these capable villagers to return to their hometowns and engage in developmental and governance activities, prioritizing their recruitment and training as party cadres.

Third, county and township party committees encourage village committees to establish various community organisations which are tailored to specific local socio-economic resources and needs. These range from, for instance, specialised agricultural cooperatives and entrepreneurial support teams to advisory councils for rural elites. Additionally, a myriad of sociocultural activities is orchestrated within the (given) community. These self-organised community entities and activities are predominantly realised through the mobilisation and coordination of party members and ordinary villagers. According to the case studies, these bottom-up organisations deliver an array of welfare services, including job training, agricultural skill development, cultural activities, administrative assistance, and social security. This party-funded cultivation of community organisation thus facilitates the provision of public services at minimal economic cost and helps to shape daily rural community life in accordance with the norms and expectations set forth by party-state governance structures.

These rural governance innovations to enhance community cohesion and vitality have been underpinned by diverse party-administered funds, which have targeted the cultivation of various community organisations in rural localities. While enhancing the effectiveness of rural autonomous governance, this financial schema has concurrently exacerbated the fiscal dependency of community governance structures on party-administered resources. Consequently, these party-building measures serve as regulatory apparatus to forestall the unregulated proliferation of non-governmental forces

in rural domains, thereby safeguarding the central authority's dominance over rural governance.

Additionally, the organisational networks engendered by party-building initiatives enable both local governments and village committees to more effectively leverage the enhanced social capital that was originally formed through informal socio-cultural networks within the locality. For instance, in the Yangmatang case, the village party committee engaged a local business leader who served as the party secretary within a private enterprise. Owing to the village's migratory culture, the facilitation efforts of this influential leader expedited the transfer of homestead land to the state-owned village development company.

Besides strengthening the party's leadership and intervention capacity in rural governance, party-building interventions have also been shown to successfully utilise rural party organisations to internalise social conflicts, so as to ensure that they are more likely to be resolved at the rural community level. As found in the case studies, these semi-public grassroots party organisations work with the active party-state to promote information sharing, resource pooling, and social reorganisation within the rural territory. Through so doing they ultimately achieve harmonious collaborative innovations. In this way, rural party organisations differ from Western political parties that emerged from the politics of difference. The primary function of rural party organisations is no longer to represent the interests of a specific class or group (which may cause social conflicts and separation) but to informally and internally address conflicts, integrate diverse actors, and maintain rural social stability. As a result of NED, rural party organisations are included in various social relations, thereby enhancing their political value.

Evidently, this relatively low-cost governance model, which bypasses formal administrative and judicial channels, has received commendation and promotion from both local and central governments. While this model bears the imprint of traditional Chinese gentry-based centralised minimalism (see Section 4.1) which was reliant on intermediary groups such as the gentry for governance, the linchpin connecting state

apparatus and community relations has shifted to the semi-formal village party organisation.

The semi-formal characteristics of this governance model serve to buffer potential direct conflicts between rural households and the party-state government, allowing higher-level governments the latitude to mediate as seemingly impartial third parties — even when the conflicts have been precipitated by party-state government policies. In the three case studies examined, villagers generally maintained positive views towards the government as a symbol, despite the inevitable day-to-day conflicts that arise between them, enterprises, and village cadres. The only discernible dissatisfaction was observed in Yangmatang, where government intervention had been concentrated and direct, thereby exhibiting the most formalised features of rural governance.

#### *(6) Urban-rural connecting*

The NED approach seeks not merely to augment state-community relations but also to enhance urban-rural connections in order to generate collaborative innovation networks that can act as catalysts for comprehensive rural development. In addition to fortifying and materialising the linking relationships that exist between the government and rural communities, the active party-state also enhances the bridging relationships between the communities and extra-local actors. This strategy seeks to bolster urban-rural socio-spatial connectivity, effectively aligning with the rural restructuring trends initiated post-NSCC. The concept of the activated community is thus beyond merely being a product of indigenous Chinese historical traditions pertaining to rural integration or a byproduct of the party-state-led hegemonic governance framework. Instead, it situates the activated community within the global trends of rural restructuring and urban-rural integration.

The key feature of NED's urban-rural connecting strategy is proactive public investment. Across the three case studies examined, it is evident that the local governments employed investment promotion strategies (e.g., cheap land, subsidies, etc.) to attract private enterprises to rural areas, thereby bolstering urban-rural economic linkages. Meanwhile, through the policy window created by the NRRS and local political

mobilisation, state-owned enterprises have become willing to invest rural areas. This strategy has diversified the socio-economic landscape of marginalised rural regions, particularly where local resources are scarce, and has served as a pre-emptive intervention to rectify potential market failures. These party-state efforts to enhance urban-rural connectivity have not only contributed to diversifying the rural economic portfolio but also exemplify the synergistic potential of such new money and new technologies in Chinese rural development. New products such as sweet potato seeds and bamboo-woven bags have been developed; both represent successful outcomes of local collaborative innovations.

In addition to material outcomes, under the auspices of the proactive local party-state, village cadres, communities, and enterprises form informal alliances. These alliances aim to navigate the barriers posed by institutional challenges, primarily the collective land ownership system, and potential social resistance to land tenure reforms. Consequently, this collaboration helps to mitigate the institutional and transactional costs involved in promoting public or private development. However, this collaborative model is different from the land finance institution. Formal retention of *de jure* collective land ownership has curtailed the traditional government-developer pro-growth coalition, forestalling the emergence of private elites with significant land holdings and, to some extent, safeguarding the stake of rural households in benefit-sharing. This evolving paradigm suggests that rural China is exploring development trajectories which are distinct from existing Chinese development model that is focused on the exchange value of land, thereby offering the potential for a model more attuned to national strategies, community needs and the use value of land.

However, without the establishment of a self-sustained mechanism for urban-rural economic value exchange — a viable and operational business model — the active party-state initiative risks generating a fragile, showcase-only “diverse” rural economy. Lanjing Village serves as a quintessential case. Here, the sustenance of state-owned restaurants and hotels largely relies on local government-sponsored events (i.e., official banquet and accommodation), which may at best achieve a precarious financial equilibrium while engendering a circulatory motion of public funds within party-state entities. The

greenhouse and private tourism companies that relied on governmental subsidies in Yangmatang provide another instructive example of the unsustainable nature of the state-reliant urban-rural connecting scheme. As critiqued by the vice general manager of Caoqiu Tourism Development Company, these public investments, along with the private tourism investments they attract, have failed to meaningfully secure stable employment for a large number of villagers. The benefits are disproportionately realised by a small subset of employed residents and local investors, leaving the majority awaiting trickle-down effects.

In summary, the activated community generated under the NRRS framework can be broken into two elements, including party-building and urban-rural connecting. Table 10.2 illustrates its practical mechanisms. The establishment of an activated community in this context diverges from the self-help communities that have proliferated due to the neo-liberal state withdrawal in some countries such as the United Kingdom. Instead, the formation process is characterised by escalating party-state interventions; both political and financial. These interventions serve to cultivate intermediary groups that are more tamed to governmental mandates, and also foster diverse rural economies supported and guided by the government.

Table 10.2 The practical mechanism of activated community of NED and corresponding central policies (Source: Author's own)

	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Selected central-level policies</b>	<b>Functions</b>
<b>Activated community</b>	<b>Party-building</b>	CPC Mass-line Education Campaign since 2013 2018 One Shoulder Pole Reform Law on Disciplinary Actions Against Public Officials	Strengthen village party leadership and fiscal capacity. Enhanced top-down party discipline and oversight, thereby precluding the formation of another 'gentry buffer'.
	<b>Urban-rural connecting</b>	2014 Rural Land Rights Separation Reform; Opinion on Improving Rural Cooperative Action Law on Rural Professional Cooperative	Stimulate collaborative innovation by enhancing the economic vitality within the communities and connectivity with the urban extra-local private and public enterprises.

*(7) Rural integration machine: dual historical logics and practical mechanism of NED*

The thesis contends that NED practice is a party-led multi-scalar and cross-sectoral collaborative innovation process. Through party-led mobilisation and financial injection, it involves not only central and local governments but also various non-governmental actors including rural communities, state-owned enterprises, universities, and private businesses. At the local level, the active party-state of the NED framework relies on promotion by county-level or higher-tier governments. It mobilises all local party-state agencies for rural development through mechanisms including political mobilisation, party-state legislation and regulation, rescaling, and programme-based financial support. The activated community within the NED is shaped through party-building and urban-rural connecting. Through these mechanisms, the government can lead the (re-)production of linking, bonding, and bridging relationships and enhance communities' capacities to manage these relationships. Through so doing it creates a party-led rural governance structure, as highlighted by Xi Jinping in terms of the objectives of NRRS (2020).

However, this study argues that the practical mechanism of the NED does not serve solely the purpose of socioeconomic advancement in rural China. While it is crucial to acknowledge that the NED is not a component of the urban growth machine, this study contends that the primary objective of the NED is not to increase the exchange value of land but to focus on its use value (though it does not entirely align with the demands of the community). This approach is fundamentally distinct from the land finance institution that shaped China's urban growth machinery, whereby local governments appropriated rural land for infrastructure development before selling it at a high price to developers. In fact, the 2018 Departmental Reshuffle and the 2018 Spatial Planning Reform that constitute some parts of the institutional foundation of the NRRS system have imposed strict restrictions on the expropriation of rural land by local governments. As evidenced by this study's case studies, any policy involving land redevelopment since the advent of

the Xi administration requires personal support from local party-state leaders, and therefore carries significant political risk.

The rural collective land ownership in rural areas remains unshaken. Facing the emerging rural restructuring that has occurred since the NSCC, the central government has, instead of destabilising this system, mandated local governments to subsidise and guide village leaders to develop collective economies — such as village-run enterprises and cooperatives — on the basis of the collective land system. Through so doing it has enabled more rural households to share in the benefits from government and private investments. These economic entities also provide platforms for collaborative innovations to occur between the community, government, and private enterprises in terms of land development. Originally, the development of rural land required the government to formally requisition and compensate for it, converting it into state-owned land for construction, which was then transferred to the development entity — be it the government, the community itself, or businesses — through auctions and other methods. However, within the framework of NED, through internal mobilisation and negotiation by community leaders, a consensus within a village can be formed, and in conjunction with the government and enterprises, the mode of collective land transfer can be determined. This model can thus largely reduce the development cost, as long as it is permitted by the local party-state leaders. Furthermore, the nominal collective land system prevents the scenario of private real estate developers directly owning vast land holdings as seen in the urban growth machine, thus indirectly ensuring that villagers benefit from development.

By examining the practices of NED, it becomes clear that a pivotal aim of this development model is to enhance the socio-economic well-being of rural communities. However, this research argues that the objective of NED is not solely socio-economic advancement. This is evident from the fact that NED has not led to fundamental changes in the urban-rural dualist governance system imposed by the party-state, the system that continues to impede rural areas from capturing developmental value and accumulating developmental capital. Instead, the current approach maintains the inequitable system that perpetuates urban-rural disparities, and is characterised by a hierarchical distribution

of administrative, fiscal, and land resources. This study argues that NED's fundamental role is to facilitate the enduring state-building objective of rural integration, thereby preserving central authority and ensuring regime stability. Indeed, upon closer examination, the term 'rural integration machine' might emerge as a more fitting term for NED's operative mechanism, especially when adopting mechanical metaphors within conceptual discourses.

The crucial roles of rural integration and social stability in the practice of NED is inherently evidenced within the NRRS policy framework. This has been clearly evident in Xi Jinping's speeches upon rural revitalisation, and were thoroughly analysed in Chapter Five. In the speeches, Xi has asserted the centrality of rural development in fortifying the state regime, and envisioning rural governance that consolidates dispersed villagers into organised collectives under the party's leadership.

Furthermore, contrasting NRRS with Western networked development practices, such as the LEADER programme, provides insight into the distinct emphasis on rural integration and subsequent regime stability under the NED paradigm. The LEADER programme allows villages to formulate their own developmental visions and strategies before competing for funding. As a result, it exerts greater control over governmental finances, although these bottom-up strategies often conform to economic imperatives, such as value for money, which can guide the focus towards pro-growth sectors. Such networked development often includes a spectrum of social development initiatives that concentrate on strengthening intra- and inter-community collaborations (i.e., bonding and bridging relationships), and thus delegate developmental discretion to the grassroots level. (This criticisms against the neoliberal features of the approach were recognised and discussed in Chapter Two.)

In stark contrast, Xi Jinping's NRRS aims neither to decentralise fiscal distribution or personnel appointment authority as a means to empower town-level grassroots governments, nor to foster village self-governance. In like manner, it does not attempt to dismantle the dualist urban-rural land and welfare systems to enhance rural access to urban resources and services. Notably, in the three case studies examined, not one



resulted in formal rural land right transactions. Other than establishing a technical school in Lanjing village, mainstream public services such as education and healthcare have not experienced substantial improvements in rural areas.

Instead of reforming the current party-state-led social governance structure and intermediaries-based rural governance structure, the NED pursues rural development through a further party-led centralisation of rural governance, which manifests in two primary ways: First, programme-based finance mandates that rural development initiatives conform to the visions of central or higher-level governments which, in turn, provide the necessary financial support, and thereby creates a dependency on fiscal backing. This dependency affects not only the villages but also the private enterprises within the rural community, a topic that is further explored in Section 10.2. Secondly, the 2018 One Shoulder Pole Reform significantly strengthened the influence of the town-level party committee over village leadership elections. Alongside this, several other initiatives have been instrumental in intensifying the central party's influence in rural governance. These include the expansion of rural party organisations, the deployment of party members within enterprises, and the establishment of community socio-economic organisations and cultural activities. All these initiatives align with directives from upper-level governments and are funded through party-building efforts. Collectively, they impact both villagers and private businesses by augmenting the central party's capacity to intervene in daily rural governance.

The subsections 1-6 have detailed the specific practical mechanisms of the rural integration machine. The driving forces behind this distinct structure are central to understanding its operational rationale, which is instrumental in analysing potential modifications and projecting the trajectory of the NED. This thesis argues that the structure is crafted under the influence of two primary logics: the 'party-state logic' and the 'intermediary integration logic.' Both of these logics are congruent with the social governance framework within which the NED functions.

Figure 10.1 explains how these two underlying logics inform the operational mechanisms of NED. First, as discussed in subsection (3) of Section 3.1, the party-state logic is

characterised by two institutional mechanisms. The first mechanism is the political tournament model, which the central authorities employ to incentivise local governments to compete with each another in achieving central governmental objectives. The realisation of this model is dependent upon a top-down political mobilisation system. This characteristic is also manifested within the NRRS, and gives rise to a political mobilisation mechanism which traverses various tiers of party-state authority within the NED's hierarchical framework.

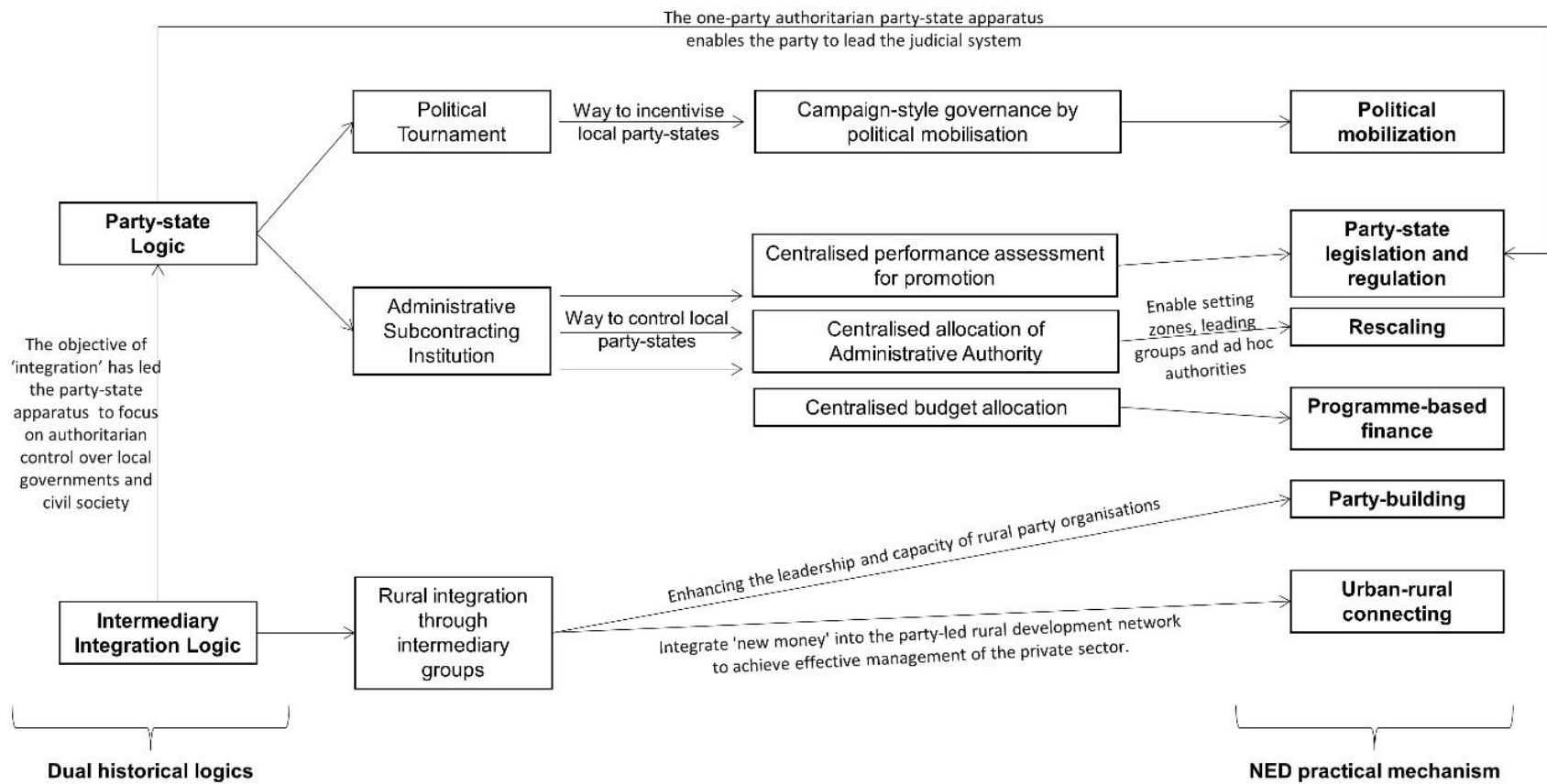


Figure 10.1 Relations between dual historic logics and practical mechanism of NED (Source: Author's own)

The second critical component of the party-state logic is the administrative subcontracting institution, which is thoroughly examined in subsection (3) of Section 3.1. This institutional construct operates through a tripartite mechanism which manages local governance. First, the centralisation of personnel appointment authority within the echelons of local or higher party committees characterises this mechanism. Here, the promotion of government officials is predicated upon top-down performance evaluation, and enables local government leaders to strategically direct officials through nuanced carrot and stick measures towards various rural revitalisation tasks. For instance, in Qianfen County, the county party committee has adopted different developmental directives within different domains of rural development: Lanjing focuses on enhancing living environments and constructing tourism facilities related to bamboo culture — a project with considerable specificity. In contrast, Qianjiachi's emphasis is on expanding the orange industry that faces the inherent uncertainties of agriculture. Thus, the county committee's performance evaluations for Qianjiachi's officials are more lenient, foster innovation, and provide the village with broader scope for governmental collaboration. After Qianjiachi's selection as a Liaison Village by the higher authorities, the county party committee's stringent directives necessitated that officials were continually present at the village so that they might swiftly improve living conditions. This policy shift manifested the dynamic nature of performance evaluations, a core aspect of the regulation-making power of local party-state leaders. At the central government level, regulation-making has effectively become party-state legislation-making, an evolution attributed to increasing party power, which, under Xi administration, has dominated all facets of society.

In the context of the administrative subcontracting institution, the second facet is the hierarchical centralisation of administrative authority. The upper-level governments have retained a comprehensive suite of powers over subcontracted governance tasks, including state programmes, which encompass supervision, guidance, approval, and an unfettered right to intervene. This constitutes an inequitable and uncertain distribution of administrative power between lower-level and upper-level authorities. Consequently, local governments are vested with considerable discretionary powers to establish various high-level *ad hoc* agencies such as leading groups, and can employ rescaling strategies

to enhance and elevate the political priority of specific rural areas or rural development domains.

The third component of the administrative subcontracting institution is fiscal centralisation. Control over budget allocation is also top-down, with the majority of tax revenues being accrued to the central government, which then redistributes funds to local and grassroots governments in a hierarchical transfer payment system. This unique fiscal model of China's party-state is a cornerstone of the programme-based financial mechanisms constituting NED. As observed in the case studies of the research, most of the rural development initiatives by the local governments or by the rural communities are funded by the top-down state programmes.

Beyond the party-state logic, the intermediary integration logic stands as the second structural governance legacy informing the rural integration machine — the practical mechanism of NED. This clientelist governance structure that utilises intermediary groups to bridge the state and rural communities persists, and within the practices of NED, it has evolved into an exercise in party-building. This evolution has amplified the reliance of rural community governance on political endorsement and financial support from the party-state government, and has sought to mitigate entrenched clientelist gentry buffers within rural daily governance.

The intermediary integration logic also dictates that enterprises become entities which are integrated into the party-directed network of rural governance and development. As discussed in Section 4.4, following enhancements in rural infrastructure and physical environment by the NSCC, an increasing influx of private capital that is motivated to invest in rural areas. These market actors have introduced a new order that seeks to maximise interests within the rural economy, and potentially foster economic growth; however, obviously, such market order does not fully align with the governance objectives of the central party-state, which prioritises social integration and stability.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, it is

---

<sup>35</sup> In fact, it is not uncommon for the Chinese government to regulate and control the private sector, due to the perception that it may destabilise and separate society and finally threaten the regime's authority. Historically, since the Han Dynasty (206 BC), the Chinese government has pursued a state policy of emphasising agriculture and suppressing commerce, a stance rooted in the

anticipated that these actors will also become targets of integration. Therefore, in the context of NED, the party-state has actively engaged in connecting urban-rural actors, and extending party-building initiatives within the private sector by expanding party branches or embedding party members within management hierarchies.

The dual historical logics — the party-state logic and the intermediary integration logic — have sculpted a particular structural dominance within the practical mechanisms of NED. These logics have historically predisposed the model towards a form of rural development that favours a top-down, party-state-led structure, which significantly outweighs the agency exercised by local communities. This provides insights as to how and why NED practice diverges from the more endogenous and participatory model that would be anticipated under the NRRS framework, in which local governments would ostensibly afford communities greater scope for involvement. All three types of villages studied (binding, striving, receiving), are increasingly demonstrating dependency on the party-state's political endorsement and financial support as it further permeates their daily development and governance activities, and thus they exhibit ever more pronounced passive features of receiving villages.

This empirical development could offer valuable insights for existing theories of rural development. Specifically, it demonstrates that a development model predicated on a top-down and centralised governance system, which aims to redress urban-rural disparities, enhance participation, and elevate the socio-economic well-being of rural communities, may result in a zero-sum dynamic between structure and grassroots agency. This perspective is further discussed in Section 11.1.

However, it should also be recognised that the prominent structure does not mean the complete eclipse of agency within rural communities, and particularly with regards to striving villages. This study finds that agency arises from the dynamic interplay between

---

Confucian pursuit of 'great unity society'. This policy prioritised righteousness over profit as a crucial means to maintain equity and stability, thus Confucianists encourage the perception of profit-making as dishonourable or even sinful (see Jacobs et al., 1995). Also, examples of the government curtailing entrepreneurial freedoms that had previously contributed to economic growth and social development are not rare in the 1990s, early stage of the Open Reform (see Huang, 2008).

political impetus behind the state programmes and the intrinsic governance characteristics of the villages themselves. The Bamboo MAZ programme originated from the directives of the provincial party secretary, whereas the Orange MAZ and Fruit MAZ were initially local policy decisions made by the county government. Therefore, the political drive behind the latter two MAZs was comparatively weaker, with only the county mayor being assigned to oversee them. In contrast, the Bamboo MAZ was led by both the county party secretary and the mayor, signalling stronger political backing. Despite only receiving minimal influence, Qianjiachi outperformed receiving villages like Yangmatang due to its striving community leadership. This village secretary of Qianjiachi contributed to the policy formulation of the orange industry, aligning the village's developmental vision with the county's policies; a process which led to more effective collaborative innovation.

Subsequently, Qianjiachi and Yangmatang experienced a secondary phase of development when selected as demonstrative villages by higher-level governments, which entailed specialised political mobilisation for their development. This top-down political mandate led to the increasing dependency of the villages on political endorsement and financial resources from local governments, and enhanced the receiving features of both. While Yangmatang received substantial investments from both public and private sectors, it failed to establish a sustainable business model which benefitted the wider community. In contrast, Qianjiachi retained significant agency, with Qianjiachi's leaders leveraging the political authority of local government to enact the land trusteeship reform and form a *de facto* alliance with local authorities to navigate changes in the central government's MAZ policies; thereby safeguarding their orange orchards.

In addition to the degree of top-down political interventions, a community's agency in rural development can be bolstered by the extent of its control over government investments and the discretionary powers that it holds over local resources. For instance, in the case of Yangmatang, while the YIDC, the public-funded village development company was chaired by the village secretary; this is not financial devolution. The LGFV retained real control of the company and sidelined village officials from management after programme completion. Additionally, through the YIDC, the LGFV secured extensive rural land

property, which further entrenched Yangmatang's receiving features. In contrast, Lanjing and Qianjiachi, located in the less developed Qianfen County, experienced limited specific public investment for their development. Direct governmental investments were primarily for infrastructure such as roads. However, villagers were endowed with more opportunities to participate in bidding for government funds. For instance, Lanjing secured county government funding for village regeneration at below-market rates, which facilitated a high-quality enhancement of the living environment therein. In Qianjiachi, the village took a bottom-up approach by reclaiming eucalyptus forests and turning them into orange orchards, setting up cooperatives, and completing land trusteeship reforms. This not only wrested control of the land from private paper mill but also facilitated effective management of agricultural production on the land within the community.

In summary, the NED has formed a rural integration machine in practice, which is driven by the active party-state and activated community. Table 10.3 presents the measures adopted by local government bodies and communities during the establishment of an active party-state framework. The table delineates the distinctive variations in the implementation of NED across diverse village classifications. The divergent developmental trajectories of the three villages indicate that direct intervention by the active party-state in rural community development can constrict the capacity of a community to pursue endogenous growth. However, if a community has already established robust bonding relationships and strong leadership, engaged in the problematisation process before such intervention, and obtained effective control of local resources (particularly land asset), then it may exhibit greater agency and voice in its development. Nevertheless, overall, under the existing framework of the NRRS all types of villages would experience an increased dependence on the party-state



Table 10.3 Corresponding local initiatives to shape active party-state in the case studies (Source: Author's own)

Active party-state	Bamboo MAZ & Lanjing Village (binding village)	Orange MAZ & Qianjiachi Village (striving village)	Fruit MAZ & Yangmatang Village (receiving village)
<b>Political mobilisation</b>	County government established the Leading Group on Bamboo Industrial Development, chaired by both county party secretary and mayor	1) County government established the Leading Group on Orange Industrial Development, chaired by county mayor; 2) Qianjiachi Village was selected as a "Liaison Village"	1) County government established the Leading Group on Constructing Provincial-level Resort Zone, chaired by county mayor; 2) Established Joint Conference on Constructing Characteristic Countryside in provincial, prefectural and county levels, chaired by county party secretary and mayor;
<b>Party-state legislation</b>	County government set bespoke performance evaluation framework for MAZ officials to facilitate progress	County government set bespoke performance evaluation framework for MAZ officials and village cadres to encourage innovation	County party secretary approved revisions to existing homestead management regulations to streamline extra-local investment
<b>Rescaling</b>	1) County government made a bespoke comprehensive plan for the village; 2) The MAZ director was the executive director of the Leading Group and served as party group members of authorities in forestry and planning; 3) County government granted the MAZ with independent budget and headcounts and higher administrative level	1) County government made a bespoke comprehensive plan for the village; 2) County government granted the MAZ with independent budget and headcounts and higher administrative level upon its elevation to provincial-level status; 3) Following the national-level honour bestowed upon Qianjiachi Village, the county government extended both the managerial purview and budget allocation for the MAZ; 4) The MAZ and Qianjiachi villagers sought pilot village status to preclude the substitution of orange	1) County government made a bespoke comprehensive plan for the village; 2) County government granted the MAZ with independent budget and headcounts and higher administrative level upon its elevation to provincial-level status; 3) After the town government's upgrade to a provincial-level special economic zone, increased land quotas and financial subsidies were allocated to the MAZ; 4) To promote the "Characteristic Countryside", the county government established a specialised office and deployed officials to

		orchards with rice by central government	integrate into the village leadership
<b>Programme-based financing</b>	1) County government established a LGFV for the MAZ; 2) County government established a development fund for the bamboo industry; 3) County government used the political impacts of the programme to leverage investment from state-owned enterprises	1) County government established a LGFV for agricultural development; 2) Upon its designation as a "Liaison Village", the MAZ received augmented programmatic resources and preferential grants from the county government	1) County government established a LGFV for the MAZ; 2) LGFV established a village-level development company;

Table 10.4 presents the measures adopted by local government bodies and communities during the establishment of an activated community framework. Compared to the active party-state, the process of cultivating an activated community can inadvertently impose greater constraints on local agency by directly interceding in both community governance and the everyday lives of villagers.

Yet, Qianjiachi, again, distinguished itself as a striving village by maintaining a degree of agency within this cultivating process. First, party-building initiatives conferred political legitimacy and financial support to foster community organisations and facilitate social activities. This support empowered Qianjiachi's village secretary to procure funding for significant local initiatives, such as land trusteeship reform, and the construction, as previously noted, of infrastructural assets integral to the village's social fabric.

Further, the local government's strategies to strengthen urban-rural connecting have enabled Qianjiachi to establish collaborative ties with experts in agricultural and rural development. Through so doing it has gained access to continual expert guidance, which has helped to refine decisions related to village development. These measures have effectively enhanced community autonomy over local developmental resources, rather than usurping the community's role in steering its own developmental course.

In stark contrast, Lanjing and Yangmatang villages have exhibited a more passive posture in the face of heightened governmental intervention. This has ultimately resulted in a curtailing of which community discretion. Yangmatang, in particular, is heavily reliant on governmental financial injections, and is on the cusp of being transformed into a mere tourist attraction, subject to the government's increasingly prescriptive regulation of everyday life through routine inspections and the promulgation of behavioural codes for the villagers.

Table 10.4 Corresponding local initiatives to shape activated community in the case studies (Source: Author's own)

<b>Activated community</b>	<b>Bamboo MAZ &amp; Lanjing Village</b>	<b>Orange MAZ &amp; Qianjiachi Village</b>	<b>Fruit MAZ &amp; Yangmatang Village</b>
<b>Party-building</b>	1) Village Committee instituted new village participatory governance mechanisms, and service teams; 2) Village Committee selected model families and individuals; 3) MAZ dispatched official to the executive board of local bamboo paper-making giant	1) Town government reformed and disciplined village leadership; 2) Town party committee enhanced fiscal capacity of village party committee; 3) Village party secretary rebuilt cadre-villager trust and stimulated local orange industry; 4) MAZ established party branches in key local enterprises and economic organisations; 5) Supported by town government, the village committee initiated "micro-battlefield" and "Qianjiachi Neighbourhood" projects;	1) Village development company regenerated public facilities; 2) Village committee grew a party work team
<b>Urban-rural connecting</b>	1) Village committee crowdfunded a tourism development company to contract projects from the MAZ; 2) The village enterprise secured public grants to refurbish abandoned houses into hotels, which were subsequently leased to private operators;	1) Village committee established a cooperative for orange industry; 2) Backed by county and town officials, the village committee completed land entrustment reform and instituted a new value-sharing mechanism within the cooperative;	1) Several private tourism companies invested the village; 2) Village development enterprise leased abandoned homesteads and farmlands to MAZ and private entities;

---

<p>3) MAZ collaborated with stakeholders in commerce, fashion, and research sectors to advance and market local bamboo products;</p> <p>4) County and town government took the village as its regular site for official banquet to sustain local economy;</p> <p>5) Local bamboo paper-making giant built a factory in the village;</p> <p>6) A technical college was moved to the village and started a bespoke course for bamboo art</p>	<p>3) MAZ improved infrastructure of the village;</p> <p>4) MAZ held regular orange festivals and cooperated with an e-business giant to train villagers;</p> <p>5) MAZ attracted and cultivated several agricultural enterprises and intermediary organisation;</p> <p>7) MAZ established partnerships with leading agricultural and rural research institutes;</p>	<p>3) County bureaus established ventures within the village and engaged in buy-back arrangements for local products;</p> <p>4) Employees from neighbouring enterprises took up residence in the village by renting local housing;</p>
--	--	--

---

## 10.2 Practical outcomes of NED

Having unveiled the practical mechanisms of the NED approach, this section discusses its practical outcomes. It concentrates on analysing the impact of NED on four principal actors, namely; the party-state, the intermediary group, villagers, and extra-local private sectors, and offers a comprehensive assessment of its operational effectiveness.

### *(1) Party-state: party's long whip for the local states and communities*

The most evident impact of NED on the party state is the reinforcement of its control over semi-formal rural party organisations through interventions such as party-building initiatives at the community level and its meddling in the appointment of village cadres (i.e., 2018 One Shoulder Pole Reform). This bolstered oversight ensures that directives from the central party-state are more effectively disseminated through the four-tiered party-state system.

Additionally, the NED framework affords the Chinese party-state apparatus an opportunity to recalibrate its internal dynamics. This recalibration aims to augment the authority of the central party-state, while simultaneously granting local party-state entities increased efficiency and flexibility in the execution of central policies. Section 3.1 commented upon

China's party-state-led social governance structure and identified three salient issues: 1) *tiao-kuai* segregations: fragmented governance between vertical state agencies and local governments; 2) rat race among governments induced by political tournament; and 3) state entrepreneurialism featured by land-based finance and urban growth machine. In brief, the fragmented governance leads to the dispersion of fiscal resources across various departments within a local government, and results in both overlapping investments and underfunding in rural areas. The tournament mechanisms serve as one of the drivers for state entrepreneurialism, which then perpetuates the marginalisation of rural areas as a resource pool of cheap land and labour for urban expansion. These challenges present institutional impediments which originate from the central government's own bureaucratic system, and impede its efforts with regard to agricultural and rural development.

Firstly, in terms of *tiao-kuai* segregation, as the centrally-initiated state programmes carry both political impetus (personnel promotion of officials) and financial resources (allocation of funding), the local party-state leaders can now leverage these state programmes as significant incentives by which to attract local party-state agencies and village cadres into participating in rural revitalisation efforts.

These top-down programmes also confer legitimacy upon local governmental efforts to enact governance reforms which allow for localised and flexible implementation of central government's objectives. Within the NED model, local leaders can overcome the fragmented local state governance through innovative governance mechanisms such as establishing high-level leading groups and restructuring departments.

However, this political endowment of local governance innovations is, in practice, largely informal and temporary, and often lacks the formal rearrangement of institutional and fiscal frameworks. For instance, in the Bamboo MAZ case, the Director of the Management Committee also served as a party group member in other local functional bureaus. In the Qianjiachi example, the village was permitted to independently reclaim forest land and turn them into orange orchards. In the Fruit MAZ case, the county secretary, leveraging the town's elevation to a provincial development zone, converted a

substantial amount of rural land for construction purposes and allowed Yangmatang to reform collective land ownership. These actions, while operationally significant, often carry substantial regulatory ambiguities and political risks; resultantly, they are characterised as informal governance innovations. It follows, that the sustainability of these governance reforms for rural development is questionable.

Secondly, from the three case studies, it is evident that the NED initiative fails to challenge the prevailing dynamics of the political tournament. NED does not challenge the arguably authoritarian social governance structure, and nor does it introduce effective bottom-up democratic governance mechanisms beyond the community scale. Conversely, the real-world operation of NED is based on the further enhancement of the prominent position of party-state authority in the society, and it thus perpetuates the existing hierarchical governance structure from which the party-state officials derive their authority. Local government leaders continue to compete for promotion via various avenues to distinguish themselves before their superiors, and the political tournament thus remains.

Moreover, the policy framework of NED does not adequately rectify the imbalance in fiscal revenue and expenditure distribution between central and local governments. The subsidies dispensed under the MAZ programme are insufficient to counterbalance the considerable investments incurred by local authorities in their efforts to draw the attention of higher-level officials. This results in an unsustainable fiscal model.

The absence of fiscal decentralisation within the NED aligns with the centralised control which is integral to the existing party-state system. Implementing fiscal devolution would directly contravene the principles of the one-party authoritarian regime that underpins the NED. However, this lack of fiscal reform means that the NED is unable to address the implications of the political tournament. Consequently, local authorities continue to prioritise making an impression on their superiors rather than addressing the genuine needs of local communities. For instance, in Yangmatang, the village party secretary (R35) suggested that certain statistics, purportedly reflecting the village's collective economic progress, were inaccurately reported. While specific details of these discrepancies were not revealed, he indicated that these statistics were compiled from the broader

Shengxiang Village area, rather than being exclusively representative of Yangmatang; a natural village within Shengxiang. This approach was adopted to project an image of accelerated economic growth, ostensibly to satisfy the expectations of higher-level authorities.

The fiscal discrepancy further leads to a paradox within the NED framework: local governments are tasked with resolving the urban-rural development disparity caused by the urban growth machine, yet they are simultaneously compelled to maintain the LGFV-based financing mechanism integral to this growth machine. The case studies in three different rural regions in China reveal that local governments frequently rely on LGFVs to fund the implementation of NRRS state programmes. The LGFVs primarily operate on land-collateralised financial debt, perpetuating a further fiscal burden on local governments. Although NED's goals differ from the urban growth machine in land-value capture and governance, their financial structures bear remarkable resemblance, implying economic unsustainability of the active party-state apparatus.

## *(2) Rural party organisation: from the soil, facing the state*

Within the NED framework, rural party organisations, serving as intermediary groups between the state government and rural society, have attained an unprecedented level of political importance and governance capabilities since the Maoist Collectivisation Movement. Under the NED, their dual role as party organisations and autonomous community leadership entities allows them to integrate into various relational networks, and foster active connections between rural communities, the intruding party-state actors, and external private entities. These rural party organisations act as a prism that amalgamate linking, bridging, and bonding relationships, creating a unified force that drives resource mobilisation and momentum for rural community revitalisation. Consequently, they have emerged as crucial instruments for the party-state, not only with regard to achieving rural integration but also in terms of promoting socio-economic progress by garnering substantial political and financial support.

Through top-down party rectification campaigns initiated by the central government, rural party organisations can remove corrupt or ineffective leaders. While this process marks the end of the road for the affected cadres, it signifies a positive shift towards greater integrity and efficiency in these intermediary organisations. The three case studies demonstrate that new community leadership is often drawn from township party committees. After the 2018 One Shoulder Pole Reform, new community leaders have typically been selected from among villagers who have returned from urban areas, thereby ensuring a blend of local familiarity and networks — essential traits for effective intermediaries — coupled with a more youthful, educated, and broadened mind gained from urban experiences.

This embedding of top-down selection by upper-level party committees into the existing democratic election processes of village committees aligns these village cadres more closely with party-state directives. In explaining how town party committees ensure their nominees for village party secretary positions are elected as village committee directors, the deputy head of the Organisation Department in Qianfen County (R20) revealed that their choices are based on extensive surveys, and that they target candidates with strong local reputations or exceptional individual skills and experiences. She also intimated that, when needed, the election process could be tactically orchestrated — termed ‘card forcing’ — where candidate selection and political mobilisation by the village party committee naturally guides villagers to elect the preferred individual of the local government.

In addition, and apart from interventions in personnel appointment, county and town-level party organisations have augmented activity funds for village party groups to promote party-building initiatives. In the case studies, all three village party committees had utilised these funds to develop their party member service teams, alongside social-cultural or economic community organisations. This enhanced the capacity of village party committees to mobilise residents. Moreover, these funds have been transformed into resources for various village regeneration projects. Infrastructure enhancements, such as village museums, have further strengthened bonding relationships between cadres and people. Consequently, rural party organisations now possess greater financial autonomy



which also allows them to implement greater changes and address community needs. This enhanced financial autonomy reinforces their authority and trust within the community.

It is also the case that by mirroring the dynamics between central and local governments, local government's intervention in personnel appointment and finances has gradually conferred increased political endorsement and authorisation upon rural party organisations, facilitating their role in rural governance. In Qianfen's two case studies, the village committees have spearheaded the formation and promotion of all grassroots social-cultural and collective economic organisations. In Yangmatang, the village party secretary and deputy secretary have joined the board of YIDC, a state-owned village development company, gaining widespread villager support. The scenario in Qianfen indicates an elevation in the village party organisations' standing among residents, while the Yangmatang's case highlights their growing political significance within the governmental framework. This disparity may stem from the higher level of government involvement in Yangmatang compared to the other villages. Nonetheless, an overall increase in prestige is evident, with villagers from all case studies expressing appreciation for the village party organisation and its leadership.

Despite the personal efforts and charisma of some village leaders, their rapidly growing prestige under the NED model largely stems from the influx of government funds and institutional support, which tangibly benefits the populace (i.e., increased income, improved living environments, and enhanced social vitality in villages). It follows, that the esteem of village cadres increasingly depends on governmental support for their initiatives and their ability to secure government funding.

This enhanced prestige also arises from a more moralistic approach to governance, which has been fostered through the top-down regular rectification and supervision by the party-state. This approach advocates moral development and a spirit of dedication, and marks a shift from the violent and corrupt rural governance that was prevalent after the 1980s. These changes are gradually steering rural party organisations towards a Confucian model of moral governance which is anchored in regional and kinship ties, individual

morality, and governmental sanction. It is also the case that it possesses a multifaceted foundation of legitimacy that is different from Western modern governance.

Moreover, the performance legitimacy of these rural party organisations, underscored by their significant socio-economic contributions to community development, is increasingly becoming a part of their governance legitimacy. Within the NED framework, rural party organisations are, in theory, subject to dual oversight: from villagers and higher-level party entities. Although the oversight from villagers may lack formality and rigidity, it is still rooted in traditional Chinese clientelist governance, which imposes moral expectations on village officials. This configuration adds a nuanced layer of accountability that complements the top-down party-state supervision, creating a hybrid governance model that balances moral responsibility with performance-based legitimacy.

In the NED model, these informal moral governance measures employed by rural party organisations have effectively mitigated the governance complexities which exist within rural communities. This effectiveness is evident in the observed reduction of crime rates, the decline in social conflicts, and the growing trust between cadres and community members in the three studied villages.

However, the long-term viability of this approach raises critical questions. The authority of rural party organisations which navigate the space between active party-state and activated community may confront challenges from both ends of this spectrum. In NED practice, decision-making predominantly resides with central and local governments, which can lead to highly exogenous state programmes, such as expansive rural tourism development, that may not align with the most acute needs of rural communities. An illustrative case is Yangmatang, where the need for industries to absorb significant local labour remains unmet. While these state programmes deliver economic benefits and environmental enhancements to villages, their sustainability is questionable, particularly in the context of China's ongoing economic downturn and reduced urban consumption. This raises concerns about the future and whether or not village cadres will be able to continue to garner community support for party-state initiatives without consistent government subsidies.

A further consideration under the NED framework is the top-down appointment process of village cadres by government party committees; reminiscent of Maoist-era governance. The efficacy of the rural integration machine inherent in the NED model, particularly in maintaining rural integration and social stability, hinges on the extent of tension that village cadres can sustain with villagers while pursuing party-state objectives. Drawing from experiences during the Maoist era, the resilience of such tension has historically been significant — to the extent that widespread famine did not incite resistance potent enough to destabilise the regime's foundations. Although it is crucial to acknowledge that modern China's socio-political landscape, governance methods, levels of economic development, and global integration are significantly different from the Maoist era, the current state-society power dynamic, defined by a centralised political tournament model inherited from the Maoist era, does not rule out this possibility.

### *(3) Villagers: socio-economic advancement and tamed participation*

Within the NED framework, there have been notable enhancements in rural socio-economic status as evidenced by two concurrent developments: the strengthening of social cohesion, and the expansion of community assets. The former has been primarily driven by party-led initiatives focused on reinvigorating community leadership, coordinating a range of socio-economic activities, and reinforcing participatory governance models to foster improved communication and dialogue within communities. The latter relies chiefly on state-driven investments in infrastructure and living environments, and the establishment of community facilities, such as village assembly halls and village history museums, coupled with the growth of rural collective economies steered by village party committees. These efforts have significantly bolstered the bonding relations within communities.

Nevertheless, the extent of socio-economic growth seems to be heavily influenced by government investment decisions related to various village industries. Insights gathered from the three case studies indicate that cultivating a sustainable, local labour-intensive agricultural industry is more conducive to economic progress than depending on the more unpredictable tourism sector, which often leans heavily on external investment.

Additionally, the linking relationships between the government and rural communities have mutually evolved. On one hand, in the three case studies, there is a notable increase in villagers' confidence in governmental initiatives, with a growing appreciation for the benefits of structured governance. On the flip side, while trust from the government towards rural communities has also grown, it has been predominantly concentrated in the 'star villages' selected by the local government.; as in the case of Qianjiachi.

Furthermore, bridging relationships between communities and extra-local actors has been actively pursued under the auspices of local government. Notably, this includes participation from private enterprises in sectors such as tourism and catering, as well as from state-owned companies with significant capital and state-funded research bodies equipped with specialised expertise (in areas such as agriculture, planning, and design). These entities have begun to play a more dynamic role in rural development. However, due to the ephemeral nature of state initiatives and the competitive political tournament, local authorities tend to focus on accumulating tangible, albeit superficial, achievements such as investment volumes, enterprise numbers, and job creation. This approach often neglects the substantial long-term outcomes of these bridging relationships. The resulting income disparity among local residents was particularly marked in the two Sichuan villages: despite Lanjing Village's larger-scale enterprises and extensive external collaborations, its inhabitants have seen more modest income growth compared to those in Qianjiachi (Lanjing 18% V.S. Qianjiachi 51%).

Despite the reorganisation and broadening of social relational networks in rural communities under the NED framework, the entrenched clientelist structure of rural governance remains largely unchanged. In fact, this structure has been further solidified through party interventions. In all three case studies, while socio-economic diversification within the villages has fostered various informal participatory governance approaches, formal avenues for villagers to express grievances or engage in meaningful dialogue with government officials remain notably lacking, with democratic and collaborative communication largely restricted to intra-community interactions. In each of the case studies, there are no established mechanisms for villagers to directly communicate grievances to governmental authorities. Instead, the Maoist *Fengqiao* experience for

community governance, as advocated by the Xi administration (refer to Appendix B for details), has been promoted, emphasising the party-led informal resolution of conflicts within the community itself. This approach reflects a continuity of traditional conflict resolution methods which prioritises community-level informal solutions while bypassing formal governmental channels.

The persistent imbalance in state-society power dynamics underscores the continuing dualist urban-rural governance. In all three studied villages, the appeal to residents remains limited, with the majority still seeking urban migration for better employment opportunities. While the orange industry in Qianjiachi demonstrates the potential for sustainable employment in rural areas, the study's broader analysis reveals that the dualistic urban-rural land market and the urban-biased distribution of socio-economic resources, such as schools and hospitals, continue to marginalise rural communities.

Under a hierarchically centralised governance system, enterprises encounter significant obstacles in investing freely in rural regions. This is evident even in sectors directly related to rural development, such as agricultural processing or logistics, where strict land-use regulations prevail. The case studies illustrate that the enterprises, including those founded by villagers, must navigate complex processes to secure vital land quotas and planning permissions. As noted, they typically require approval from provincial authorities. In practice, local governments often fail to obtain formal development permissions from higher-level authorities. However, driven by the motivation to stand out in the political tournament, they must advance various construction and development activities required for the state programmes in short period. Consequently, they often risk violating state regulations to grant the necessary authorisations for rural development. As seen in the Yangmatang example, these authorisations typically end with the conclusion of the programmes and are unsustainable.

Whilst the NED may seek to address the issue of land financialisation inherent in the urban growth machine, it falls short in rectifying the fundamental shortcomings in rural social welfare and economic diversification. As elaborated in Section 5.1, Xi Jinping's speeches advocated for the NRRS suggest his endorsement of the dual land system as

a means to uphold social stability. Given China's vast population, urban centres are incapable of providing stable employment for the extensive rural populace (Wen, 2021). Consequently, rural areas act as a reservoir of surplus labour, particularly during times of economic downturn, as noted by Wen (2021). The dualist urban-rural land system may partially explain China's avoidance of extensive slums and landless farmers, a common phenomenon in other rapidly urbanising nations in the Global South, as discussed by Zhang (2021). However, this does not justify the deficiencies in rural welfare provision or the government's predominant investment in physical infrastructure over social and human capital development. Despite its status as a high-priority initiative for the central government, the MAZ programme, inadequately incorporates these broader community and social development objectives into its policy implementation and evaluation metrics. Efforts to establish various community organisations tend to depend on limited party-building funds instead of central government initiatives; the latter continue to favour physical output over holistic social development outcomes. This discrepancy highlights a critical gap in addressing the comprehensive needs of rural communities within the current NED framework.

The apparent material advantages provided by NED for rural integration may also mask a deeper trend of political compliance in China's rural communities which could render the NED approach somewhat exploitative. The situation in Yangmatang Village serves as a case in point. Under the guidance of the village party committee, residents relinquished their *de facto* ownership of their homes to the YIDC in return for a stable rental income. This was followed by a reconfiguration of the YIDC's management under government supervision, which effectively diminished the influence of the village party committee. This manoeuvre transferred effective land control to the local government, which then sought to monetise these rural land assets. Simultaneously, the local government began managing the village as a tourist area, and enforced new behavioural codes on the inhabitants, such as banning street vending outside their residences. These developments further restricted the villagers' autonomy in their everyday lives, and highlights a shift towards greater government control under the guise of development.

The increasing political and financial dependency of the communities onto the party-state is shaped not only by exogenous governmental interventions but also by the institutionalised scarcity of endogenous development resources in rural areas; a consequence of the urban-rural dualist governance structure. Hindered by the dualist governance structure in multiple domains — finance, land, and public services — rural communities struggle to acquire endogenous development resources through market channels. Under the NED framework, and through programmes like MAZ, villages can temporarily gain access to essential elements for development (i.e., capital, land, labour, technology etc.) and the rights to use them. The scarcity of market resources, coupled with reaching-in governmental financial and institutional resources, deepens rural society's dependency on the party-state apparatus, and particularly the central party-state. Consequently, the party-state apparatus continues to exert a firm grip on political power. This trend was particularly apparent in the research where, even after becoming showcasing 'star villages', rural communities still relied heavily on party-state support.

This dependency on the party-state has extended beyond political-economic dimensions, and has penetrated into the realms of consciousness and subject formation within rural communities. In the fieldwork investigation, the most salient observation of the author was that villagers and village cadres generally could not conceive of alternative development pathways if they opted not to participate in this orchestrated party-state-led social network. This subtle control erodes the spontaneity and legitimacy of grassroots initiatives, and instils in network participants a perpetual quest for exogenous legitimacy from the party-state. In addition, the control network established in rural areas can extend to private enterprises operating in rural areas; as noted in the case studies. The dependency on exogenous legitimacy conferred by the party-state may also manifest itself in everyday activities where all non-governmental actors (including both communities and private sectors) habitually question — “Is this action of mine likely to garner support from the party-state?”. When this occurs, it signifies the annihilation of the genuine agency of communities.

#### *(4) Extra-local actors: political dividends and tributes*

The case studies suggest that extra-local actors can be divided into two categories based on their ownership. The first category includes private sector actors, notably agricultural and tourism enterprises, along with domestic and international NGOs. The second encompasses state-owned enterprises and government-funded research bodies, such as universities and research institutes.

In the private sector, the case studies reveal that participation in rural revitalisation campaigns can yield significant benefits. These include financial gains from agricultural activities, direct government subsidies, and critically, reduced transaction costs in leasing non-transferable rural collective land. Without the political campaigns and government support, securing land-use rights and planning permissions would be challenging due to the complexities and inconsistencies in China's legal framework for rural land management. Additionally, the benefits extend to political advantages. For example, in the Yangmatang study, the president of the Caoqihuazhu Company was appointed as a commissioner of the prefectural CPPCC, aiding her rise to leadership in several county-level business associations.

However, the economic and political advantages granted by the active party-state often require a certain level of allegiance to the party-state, potentially at the cost of some corporate independence. In the Orange MAZ, for instance, major companies set up party branches, and in the Bamboo MAZ, the Varnova Group's management has liaison officers dispatched by the local government. Despite this, the comments received in this study's interviews suggest that these enterprises have not experienced direct party committee interference in their operational decisions. A cooperative relationship is maintained between the party committees and the corporations, underpinned by mutual dependence: the local government provides subsidies and land in return for the businesses' continued presence in rural areas, thereby evidencing the government's success in diversifying rural economies.

Distinct from the private sector, state-owned enterprises and academic institutions engage in the NED as a form of political tribute. This involvement overtly signals their loyalty to the party-state structure, and affords them a competitive edge in the political



tournament. Notable examples include proactive contributions from universities and agricultural research institutes in Qianjiachi Village, which were driven by party leadership. In addition, in Lanjing Village, following frequent visits by the provincial and ministerial-level senior officials, state-owned enterprises from other regions of Sichuan rapidly invested in the local catering and hotel industries.

However, this form of engagement places a financial strain on these state-owned/funded organisations, as such investments are frequently not profitable. With central government's heightened scrutiny over public sector debt, the long-term viability of such participation is questionable. Additionally, as observed through the author's research experience in various rural planning projects across China, university faculties and planners are often mandated to spend considerable time in villages in order to contribute to rural development initiatives. This requirement exerts significant pressure on their personal and professional lives. This concentration of expertise and resources tends to create star villages that benefit from governmental focus, a model not readily replicable on a wider scale.

##### *(5) The sustainability challenges of NED's socio-economic advancement*

While the NED indeed confers certain socio-economic benefits, the study a significant concern: the risks stemming from the unsustainability of the NED model. These risks become evident in two primary aspects: First, there is the risk of fiscal unsustainability. Though Qianjiachi has developed a relatively resilient and continuously profitable industry, the case studies of Lanjing and Yangmatang show that neither village has succeeded in creating sustainable economic models. As a result, governmental investments — including subsidies and economic incentives provided to villagers — have become idle assets. The state-owned/funded entities that have invested in the infrastructure and tourism facilities in the villages are neither statutory nor permanent local administrative agencies (i.e., town governments), and this makes them vulnerable to dissolution via policy changes. Meanwhile, the interviews with the directors of these committees that were undertaken by the author elicited information which indicated a conspicuous absence of effective coordination mechanisms with township governments and exit

strategies, despite shared governance areas. In fact, the officials of these *ad hoc* committees often did not recognise the necessity to form cooperative relationships with the township governments. Indeed, from the interviews with three MAZ directors (R1, R18, R30), it is evident that the leaders of the *ad hoc* authorities often define the work of the MAZs as being focused on agricultural economics and technological development, and also view the township governments as responsible for the long-term social governance and development of the villages. As the director of Fruit MAZ (R30) said,

“Our main focus is on advancing agricultural modernisation. That's economic and industrial work for us. The town government, they handle social governance, community stuff. We operate separately, so there's not really a need for cooperation mechanisms. But, if it ever becomes crucial, I guess the most likely solution would be to bring the town government into our fold. Like, merge the zone committee and the town government into a single authority”.

This institutional arrangement not only absolves the more resource-endowed MAZ Management Committees from their responsibilities pertaining to long-term community development and public service provision within the rural areas they cover, but also casts doubt on the sustainability of their investments. If the MAZs were disbanded in the future, the question of who would bear the maintenance costs of the tourism and exhibition facilities that they invested in remains unresolved.

The socio-economic advantages are predominantly facilitated by the programme-based financing model. An analysis of the case studies indicates that this model, paralleling the urban growth machine which the NED seeks to counter, is heavily dependent on public financial investment and local government indebtedness, chiefly orchestrated through LGFVs. Rural communities under the NED framework seem to lack a coherent and stable business strategy. Additionally, and facing the recent economic downturn as well as continuing rural depopulation, the private sector has encountered substantial challenges in deriving profit from rural development initiatives. This, in turn, has disproportionately increased the financial onus on governmental bodies. The original urban growth machine at least had a functional, albeit unsustainable, capital cycle mechanism. In this model, governments invest in land and sell it to real estate developers, then channel the proceeds

to subsidise manufacturing enterprises to generate foreign exchange earnings, and through so doing develop the macroeconomy, increase monetary liquidity, and enhance residents' income. Concurrently, real estate developers transform high land costs into housing prices, and pass these onto the increasingly affluent residents, thereby perpetuating the cycle of land acquisition and sales. In contrast, the case studies on NED practices showed an absence of viable business models, and were characterised by an excessive dependency on government investments to establish showcase projects. However, given the considerable number of administrative villages in China (in excess of 500,000), it is financially impractical for public funds to sustain investments amounting to tens or hundreds of millions of yuan per village; as observed in the case studies.

The economic rationale underpinning NED suggests a critical equilibrium point: if the economic cost of NED achieving central authority's governance goal (primarily rural integration and ensuing regime stability) surpasses the capacity of public finance system, this development model will face structural instability. This could potentially result in stagnation or even collapse; as indicated by the local government's withdrawal of the YIDC in the Yangmatang case. This financial unsustainability is also evidenced by the implementation of NED, which is largely confined to individual star villages and thus difficult to scale up. China's recently intensifying economic downturn — marked by stagnant exports and a looming land finance debt crisis — may accelerate the fracture of this precarious balance. If this is the case, when investments in rural areas fail to effectively translate into domestic consumption, the central government is likely to discontinue further investments in rural socio-economic improvements. Furthermore, it might resort to more coercive measures to maintain rural social stability and integration, akin to the quasi-military collectivisation movements and people's communes of the Maoist era. Within the existing rural governance structure which is, as noted, composed of a highly centralised party-state logic and an intermediary integration logic centred on stability and integration/unity, the possibility of such a catastrophic shift in NED is not implausible. The already established party-led governance structure in rural China through the NED — exemplified by the expanding party network, a multi-scale party-led mobilisation system, and the growing political-economic dependency of local state and

communities on party authority — lays the fundamental institutional groundwork for authoritarian coercive control.

Aside from financial unsustainability, the political force that underpins the NED, is also inherently unstable. When the objectives of central government and rural socio-economic development cease to resonate with each other, the efficacy of political mobilisation diminishes. As evidenced by the two Sichuan case studies, the central government's MAZ policy experienced a radical shift from promoting tourism and cash crops to focusing on subsistence crops. This shift was propelled by the more pressing and significant challenges posed by the global food crisis to centre's capacity to integrate and govern society. This policy shift threatens rural economic diversity as well as local revenue streams, especially given that the prices for subsistence crops are stringently regulated by the state. Within the hierarchical party-state-led social governance structure, local authorities are inclined to leverage the political mobilisation opportunities offered by the NED to meet the objectives of the higher government at any cost. When the interests of rural communities' conflict with national governance objectives, it is the communities that are ones which bear the brunt. While village cadres, acting as intermediary groups, may offer some mitigation of these tensions during policy implementation, the increasing reliance of rural party organisations' personnel appointments (in other words, the source of their governing authority) on the endorsement of local governments can cast doubt on the efficacy of such mediation.

In general, this chapter has provided a comprehensive understanding of NED's practical mechanisms and outcomes, and through so doing has completed the study's conceptualisation of the NED. The chapter, and the thesis more widely, has argued that the practical mechanism of NED manifests as a multi-scalar, cross-sectoral process of collaborative innovation under party leadership. It leverages political mobilisation, party-state legislation, rescaling, and programme-based financing to create an active party-state. Concurrently, through community party-building and urban-rural connecting, it transforms rural villages into activated communities.

These approaches to rural development comprise what this thesis has termed the rural integration machine; a framework that not only proactively bolsters community and enterprise participation as well as nurturing local development and governance innovations but also aligns stakeholders within a network that relies on hierarchical political endowment and fiscal patronage from party-state apparatus. This thesis argues that this practical mechanism of NED is embedded within what can be termed China's intermediary integration logic and the party-state logic. These logics are interwoven and together constitute the contemporary institutional context of rural governance in China. The 'intermediary integration logic' refers to China's central authority's historical reliance, since imperial times, on Janus-faced intermediary groups, which have facilitated a clientelist ruling structure by which to govern rural society. The party-state logic denotes the highly centralised and hierarchical bureaucratic and social governance systems controlled which are by the CPC and have been progressively established since the 1950s. The NED model effectively integrates diverse actors within a coherent structure dominated by the CPC, and thereby enables the integration of an increasingly pluralistic rural society into the party-state apparatus.

Table 10.5 Summary of impacts of NED on key stakeholders (Source: Author's own)

	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Costs/deficiencies</b>
<b>Party-state government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced capacity to intervene rural community governance;</li> <li>- Capacity to adjust the pro-growth agenda of local government;</li> <li>- Mitigation of fragmented governance through local state intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Persistent 'political tournament';</li> <li>- Public finance debt risk</li> </ul>
<b>Rural party organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Augmented leadership;</li> <li>- Increased funding;</li> <li>- Elevated authority within the community;</li> <li>- Greater significance in the social governance structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More governmental control and oversight;</li> <li>- More pressure to balance party-state mandate and community demands;</li> <li>- Persistent marginal position within the social governance system</li> </ul>
<b>Villager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Socio-economic and environmental progress;</li> <li>- Strengthened social cohesion;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhanced political compliance to the party-state;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expansion of community assets;</li> <li>- Enhanced urban-rural connectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of democratic channels for participation in rural development decision-making;</li> <li>- State programmes lacking focus on social and human development of rural communities</li> </ul>
<b>Extra-local actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subsidies from public funds;</li> <li>- Access to the development of rural collective land;</li> <li>- Private entities: political stature;</li> <li>- State-owned/funded entities: demonstrating loyalty to the upper-level party state and seeking promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dependence on financial support and political endorsement from the party-state;</li> <li>- Public finance debt risk</li> </ul>

The practical outcomes of the NED have implications for various stakeholders. These implications are summarised in Table 10.5. The study finds that under NED, different social relationships within rural communities have been (re-)constructed, and that party-led actor networks have been established to further rural development. However, these actor networks and the new relationships which the NED fosters are inherently vulnerable, predominantly because they depend on transient and unstable public financing and political backing. These risks involved in fostering effective rural development through the establishment of a centralised rural governance regime led by the state apparatus should be approached with great caution.

## Chapter Eleven: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the thesis by addressing two pivotal questions. Section 11.1 responds to the question: what is the value of NED to global rural development studies? And elucidate the theoretical contributions of this research to the broader field as well as noting the thesis's limitations. Thereafter, Section 11.2 tackles the question: how can NED be improved in the future? and, in so doing, offers a series of moderate policy recommendations which are intended to guide countries in the Global South, especially those characterised by authoritarian regime and informal clientelist governance akin to China's, as to how they might reform their approaches to rural development.

### 11.1 Contributions and limitations of the research

The most direct contribution that this thesis makes to the furtherance of existent academic knowledge is addressing of the present research gap regarding the MAZ policy. While this area-based initiative is a typical NRRS policy that has been widely promoted in different regions of China, it has been, as was noted in Chapter One, under-researched in both Chinese and English literature. Beyond this, the research makes three distinct contributions to the broader field of rural development studies which are applicable to both China and global scale and focus on the epistemology, methodology, and ontology of Chinese rural development under Xi administration.

*(1) Epistemology: how can we understand the rural development practice of China and Global South/East?*

From an epistemological perspective, the author believes that this study offers several insights for global rural research. Firstly, there is a need to “take the rural back.” For a long time, rural development has not garnered sufficient attention in planning and geography disciplines. Often, it has been perceived merely as a residual existence in the processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, and modernisation; as ancillary to the urban machinery rather than a primary subject (Gkartzios et al., 2022). This phenomenon is not unique to China but is a common issue in the era of so-called planetary urbanisation (Wang et al., 2023).

Despite the appearance from a political-economic standpoint that rural China may be subordinate to urban areas, this does not signify a complete triumph of the grand narrative of planetary urbanisation, nor does it imply the dissolution of the value of rural theory. The case of China illustrates that urban theories dominated by economic growth paradigms, such as the urban growth machine, fail to adequately explain rural practices in China. Moreover, the rural can reflect the cultural underpinnings of a society, especially in developing countries. China's complex state-society relations and the central government's social governance mechanisms aimed at national integration are manifested in rural areas. This offers an explanation for understanding China's shift in recent economic challenges, where urban spatial governance and development objectives rapidly transition from growth to multifaceted demands for safety, stability, and legitimacy (Wu et al., 2022).

Second, there is a need to take the relationship back to understand rural development practices to promote global comparative research. As Gkartzios and Lowe (2019) suggest, real-world rural development initiatives are mostly networked, including both external and local actors. Linking, bridging, and bonding — three types of social relationships — constitute the foundation of the majority of social networks. Attempting to ground the analysis in social relationships, this paper designs an analytical framework and presents empirical case studies through the lens of the phased changes in various relationships within and outside communities. The author believes that this attempt, by allowing Global South/East research to develop its own theoretical frameworks and distil rural development models based on different governance backgrounds, facilitates scholars from diverse global contexts to more easily comprehend the specific dynamics and similarities and differences in the execution of different development models. This is expected to aid in promoting mutual learning and innovation among global rural development practices.

Third, there is a need to take the state back to rural studies. An important insight from the Chinese case, especially pertinent to rural areas in Global East/South countries, is that scholars should recognise that the distinction between rural and urban areas is not solely in their engagement with the modern economic sector, but also in the extensive socio-



cultural and institutional legacies predating the influx of Western industrial-urban development models and related political ideologies. These legacies have facilitated a differentiated process of modern nation-state construction. To a significant extent, rural governance and development models respond to the governance structures shaped by these legacies. To analyse these legacies, attention should not only be directed towards rural society itself but also towards the complex reflexive relationships between state and society. This focus is epistemological and does not imply adherence to the ontological dichotomy of state-society opposition, which is commonly applied in Western political studies (Huang, 2008b).

For China, a country with thousands of years of centralised autocratic governance history, the lens of state is particularly crucial for understanding the social governance structures that have shaped rural development models. Rural areas carry a significant amount of socio-cultural and institutional structures from the country's ancient agrarian society, forming the governance structure of contemporary Chinese society (Heilmann, 2018; Tsai, 2007; Zhou, 2019). These indigenous structures, though overshadowed by rapid urbanisation since the 1980s Open Reform, have not disappeared. Instead, they are deeply embedded in the everyday practices of urban and rural spatial development and governance (Zhou, 2022).

Considering the unique political system of party-state unity established in China since the twentieth century, this study suggests that the term "party-state" more accurately describes China's social governance agent than the term "state" alone. In fact, if one abstracts from the party-state-led social governance structure, the specific measures of the NED share many similarities with existing Western rural development models. For example, both NED and the (neo-)endogenous models emphasize diversifying rural economic structures through initiatives like tourism development, while NED and exogenous models both highlight government intervention and external investment. It is precisely the party-state-led social governance structure that differentiates the Chinese model from existing Western paradigms at a fundamental level. This also explains the observed trend towards centralised governance and the emergence of sustainability issues in the implementation of NRRS.

Therefore, NRRS framework and NED should not be confined to viewing it merely as a sectoral development policy in agriculture and rural areas. Instead, it must be contextualized within the evolving backdrop of governance that underlies it. Through dissecting the institutional legacies that significantly influence the formation and operation of NED, namely two localised, historically rooted logics — the authoritarian party-state logic and the clientelist intermediary integration logic — this study has offered novel perspective for understanding China's emerging party-led networked rural development practice which transcends conventional Western exogenous-endogenous narratives and networked development approaches.

This thesis's conceptualisation of NED, along with the display of its dual historical logics, is not a call to view China's rural development practices and underlying governance structures as entities separate from its urban society. Instead, it urges a meticulous examination of their commonalities with urban governance and in particular their close ties with the overarching historical structures that influence the entire national socio-spatial domain such as the party-state government and the informal clientelist governance culture. By doing so, it presents a holistic underlying logic of China's socio-spatial governance which encapsulates both urban and rural dimensions across historical and contemporary contexts.

*(2) Methodology: how can Chinese rural development practices under NRRS be examined?*

This research proposed a relational perspective as its analytical framework to examine China's NED practice. While the framework's three types of relationships (linking, bonding, and bridging) and certain analytical elements drew inspiration from predominantly Western-based studies (for instance, Neumeier, 2017; Putnam, 2000; 1995; Woolcock, 2002), the study integrated these components with the distinct features of China's governance structure. This amalgamation aided the examination of the (re-)production of these relationships and their associated resources in a manner that was both sensitive to the specific Chinese context and adaptable to future cross-contextual analysis.

The framework was applied to three distinct types of rural communities in China. The three types of villages (receiving, striving, and binding) were classified through the lens of the relationships between them and external actors. This effort to typologies the differentiated rural China could have been recognised as a key contribution of the thesis, as existent relevant literature often focuses on topographic or economic aspects without deeply integrating these with community-level power relations and governance characters. However, the classification within this study was not derived from my original empirical research but instead predominantly built upon a relevant study by Li (2013). His study guided this research towards identifying binding and striving villages in the less-developed central and western regions of China, as well as receiving villages in the economically advanced eastern region.

The primary reason for adopting this approach was centred upon Li's effective integration of the relationships that exist between diverse stakeholders with their geographical features. The other reason pertained to the scarcity of community-level data in rural China, which posed a significant obstacle to conducting original empirical research within the timeframe of a doctoral study. Most public official data only reach the town level and generally does not include information related to politics or governance.

Another challenge for developing an original classification of villages arose from the "Zero-Covid" pandemic control measures and the Chinese government's heightened concerns over national security in research activities involving foreign academic institutions. These circumstances considerably hindered the author's fieldwork in China, and precluded the ability to further contrast the selected villages, all of which were local government showcase projects, with their less advantaged neighbours.

Nevertheless, the comprehensive developmental processes of the three villages are sequentially detailed in the research. By comparing these villages before and after their designation as showcase projects, the study can shed light on the marginalisation experienced by other villages not privy to similar government focus and public investment. The case of Qianjiachi is particularly illustrative of this phenomenon. Despite its bottom-up developmental achievements, Qianjiachi did not gain the local government's trust until

its unforeseen selection as the “Liaison village” for the CLGRW. Following this designation, there was a notable increase in the extent and speed of resource allocations to the village, including land and financial subsidies, which were considerably more significant than what it had received before.

*(3) Ontology: what are Chinese rural development practices under the NRRS?*

The thesis delved into the governance context and inner mechanisms of NED in detail; a further key contribution of the work. In addition to seeking to foster international theoretical dialogue across different contexts, a detailed exposition of NED practices may draw public attention to the dubious aspects of these socio-political practices, thereby paving the way for accountability. This ‘transparency to accountability’ approach, championed by scholars such as Flyvbjerg (2002), has been proven to be instrumental in enhancing the quality of public policymaking and its implementation, as it can problematise the actions and discourses that “had seemed to go without saying” (Miller, 1993, p.235).

By analysing the NRRS framework, the thesis conceptualised the ideal structure of the NED as comprising the active party-state and the activated community. Subsequently, through its use of case studies, the study scrutinised the practical mechanisms and outcomes, and depicted the interactions and dynamics that occurred between the party-state, intermediary groups, and rural communities. The research recognises the potential of this party-led networked development approach in structurally addressing the oppressive urban-biased governance structure in China, which traditionally extracts value from rural areas. This generally aligns with Bock's (2016) recommendations for the engagement of structural entities, such as the state, in rural development initiatives. The confluence of an active party-state and activated communities has culminated in party-led, multi-scalar and cross-sectoral collaborative innovations for rural development. Given the low community capacity in rural areas, local party-state governments can preemptively engage in the problematisation of underdeveloped and incohesive rural communities through party-building initiatives and fiscal interventions. Collaborating with rural party organisations, they can promote the expressions of interest by fostering community organisations and supporting private enterprises. During the delineation and

coordination phases, strategic interventions by the local party-state governments were shown to be executed to ensure that the majority of individual villagers — especially those listed as the most impoverished — could retain benefits from rural development by guaranteeing financial inflows into their collective economies (i.e., rural collective economic organisations such as village enterprises or cooperatives).

Although the policy framework of the NRRS appears to offer substantial scope for community participation in NED practice, this empirical study did not observe significant community agency. On the contrary, under NED, the development paths of communities, particularly those of select villages, were seen to increasingly exhibiting features of receiving villages, in which the party-state-led ‘structure’ is becoming more dominant. The investment of political capital by the party-state in these projects implies that their success could drive local party-state governments to hijack the successes achieved through communities’ agency. This dynamic reflects the increasing tendency of local authorities to eclipse and assimilate community accomplishments, and reinforces the predominant leadership of the party-state in such developmental processes. This echoes with the leitmotif of Xi’s social governance strategy, characterised by “unswervingly upholding and strengthening the comprehensive leadership of the party” (Xi, 2021, p.4).

The practice of NED model has been shown to enhance the socio-economic profile of local households and communities. This enhancement is evidenced by increased income levels, improved living environments, and strengthened social connectivity both within the community and between the community and external stakeholders. In the three cases studied, the social relations within each village were notably restored to some extent, facilitating the formation of networks of actors that promote local rural development. Top-down government initiatives, accompanied by the influx of funds and personnel assignments, strengthened the linking relationships between the villages and local public sectors. The implementation of these projects further enhanced the interactions between officials and villagers, as well as among the villagers themselves. As socio-economic conditions and living environments improved, disputes among villagers gradually decreased, thereby repairing bonding relationships. Moreover, under government

facilitation, external entities, including state-owned and private enterprises as well as research institutions, established close bridging relationships with these villages.

However, the study also highlights the intrinsic financial unsustainability and political volatility of this approach and how it may limit development resources to a few selected villages and hinder scalability. Meanwhile, as villages increasingly engage in government-initiated programmes and development processes, the apparent vitality of these communities belies a gradual constriction of their autonomy and agency due to the intensifying penetration of party-state governmental power.

While the NED may currently benefit certain rural regions, it was suggested that its future effectiveness is uncertain due to potential shifts in central policy from a soft integration of rural areas to a more authoritarian, tightly controlled approach. After all, the NED has fostered a governance structure that consolidates the party's dominance over daily rural development and governance activities and through so doing created an institutional foundation for this kind of policy shift.

Given this, it is questionable whether the rapid extension and deepening of the central party-state's reaching-in power into grassroots society truly enhances its regime stability. However, what is certain is that under the structure of NED, there has been limited improvement in community agency and self-capacity for sustainable development, even though their socio-economic conditions have seen some improvements as a consequence of substantial government investments. NED practice is becoming a zero-sum game, where the strengthening of the party-state-led structure is occurring at the cost of diminishing agency in communities.

## **11.2 Recommendations**

### *(1) Creating a community-facing intermediary group*

Given China's extensive rural hinterlands and dispersed population, efforts to integrate rural areas into the ambit of the party-state apparatus will continue to depend on intermediary groups. As the government has intensified its interventions in personnel

appointments and fiscal distribution since NRRS, the governance focus of these rural intermediary groups is increasingly aligned with top-down state programmes and mandates, leading to their Janus-faced nature becoming predominantly state-oriented.

This study posits that attempting to implement comprehensive reforms in the formal social governance institutions from the top down is virtually unfeasible under the current political system. Therefore, a more pragmatic approach could be encouraging intermediary groups, particularly village cadres, to become more community-oriented. The research suggests two methods to achieve this goal.

First, it is imperative to re-embed the everyday operations of intermediary groups into local economies. Despite the party-state-led initiatives which have enabled rural communities to gain substantial linking and bridging relational resources, the apparent vitality and diversity of local economic activities do not automatically equate to sustainable business models; the foundation of any economy (Osterwalder, 2005). Such models should facilitate thorough integration and equitable benefit distribution within the (given) community. However, the accumulation of public investments and facilities in communities, guided by top-down programme evaluation criteria from higher-level authorities, may not necessarily convert into wealth-generating infrastructure. Concurrently, the day-to-day governance activities of intermediary groups have been sidetracked. This shift has led to a focus on preserving investments from higher authorities and sustaining their own power and linking relationships, rather than fostering community socio-economic development. For instance, in the Yangmatang case, the refurbished rural streets and developed areas are not able to be utilised by rural households for setting up stalls, and the economic connections between private tourism businesses and villagers are confined to limited employment opportunities. As nominal custodians of these collective village assets, the daily governance of rural party organisations appears to have become preoccupied with managing an abruptly expanded tourism site, akin to Jack's rapidly grown beanstalk, rather than genuinely investigating a business model that truly resonates with their given village's unique resources.

The case studies reveal the importance of the choice of industrial trajectory in embedding intermediary groups into local economies. Compared to tourism, which relies more on external investment and incurs high ongoing maintenance costs, agriculture allows for broader participation in production and profit-sharing by village officials and by as many villagers as possible; there are lower entry barriers. Agriculture is fundamentally based on arable land. Under the current collective land ownership system, all families can be allocated roughly equal areas of farmland, thereby lowering the barriers for residents to engage in production and share in the benefits. In contrast, developments such as tourism are inherently imbalanced due to the uneven distribution of tourist resources and the capital investments required. Driven by personal economic interests, residents can be more inclined to overcome political indifference and actively engage in community development initiatives. This active involvement can, in turn, encourage intermediary groups, as community members, to increasingly focus on communal interests in their day-to-day operations, rather than merely adhering to governmental mandates.

Secondly, it is crucial to enhance the understanding of the operational logic of the party-state among rural households and intermediary groups. As Foucault (1977) points out, those who control knowledge also control the power. Due to the dominant role played by party-state government in rural governance, the knowledge and power discourses relied upon for the formulation of rural development strategies are mostly derived from within the bureaucratic system, rather than from the local everyday knowledge and discourses possessed by the villagers. It follows, that the party-state's dominance in producing and disseminating knowledge creates a power imbalance that marginalises the local knowledge and discourse of the villagers. As a result, both residents and village cadres, acting as non-bureaucratic actors, find it difficult to engage in equal and effective communication with the party-state government when it comes express a community's interests and visions, and with regard to integrating with the NRRS programmes that often possess broad targets. This is probably why the secretary of Yangmatang Village was willing to withdraw from a YIDC. His difficulty in operating YIDC is not due to an inherent inability to manage a community company, but rather stems from the challenges of running a community company that is led by government bureaucracy.



Therefore, it is necessary to increase the rural residents' and village cadres' knowledge of the discourse and logic of the party-state system, to broaden the sources of knowledge production in rural governance. A healthy activated community should be capable of interpreting and relating official policy discourses to their everyday community life. Given that the development of rural social space involves complex technical knowledge of multiple sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, and architecture, it is possible to use the existing societal political mobilisation system to incorporate professional actors with relevant technical knowledge (e.g., universities, planning institutes, NGOs, emerging professional rural development institutes) as a supplement to the intermediate groups centred on village cadres. These professional actors can not only facilitate communication between the community and the party-state by effectively translating each party's discourse for the other but also use technical discourse to enhance the communities' ability to counterbalance the party-state's external influences. Through these measures, the endogenous production of both bonding and bridging relationships can be achieved.

## *(2) Creating an innovation-friendly programme-based governance structure*

The current fiscal model of the NED is characterised by top-down state programmes. This has resulted in the formation of collaborative innovation networks at the local level, but these networks have not transformed into business models which are tailored to the local resources or governance models that are emanating from community needs. Consequently, the sustainability of NED is diminished. While this feature is expected to be neutralised by grassroots party-states and communities during the implementation stage, the empirical findings of this study have shown that under the current hierarchical and technocratic programme design and allocation mechanism, effective endogenous innovation of communities and other non-governmental actors is structurally constrained. Moreover, within the existing NED model, the local government's allocation of programme resources is almost opaque. The villages that receive resources are not necessarily those in greatest need, but those that enable local officials to showcase achievements and stand out in the political tournament.

This study proposes that valuable insights could be gleaned from the LEADER programme as a means to moderately reform the current programme-based financing approach, and enhance communities' voice and agency. The author contends that, compared to the NED, that the key distinctions of neo-endogenous development models as exemplified by LEADER lie primarily in two aspects: power decentralisation and competitive allocation of public finance. Accordingly, the thesis proposes the following recommendations.

First, in designing NRRS initiatives, the central government should focus on enhancing community self-development capacities, and particularly with regard to fostering entrepreneurial and innovative skills, and widespread agricultural knowledge. This approach need not conflict with party-building activities.

Additionally, programmes designed by the central government should streamline existing detailed quantitative evaluation metrics, and opt for key developmental indicators that ensure central government's strategic leadership in rural development. Subsequently, a bidding mechanism could be introduced which would allow villages to conceptualize their own visions and prepare application documents and plans. This process would help identify communities with competent leadership, social cohesion, and viable business models; and allow for targeted resource allocation, including mainstream resources accompanied by localised implementation plans. Communities that do not succeed in the bidding process, should not resort to drastic measures such as demolition or consolidation, but be provided with basic public services. Later, drawing inspiration from the UK's key settlement policy (Cloke and Shaw, 1983; Sturzaker, 2019), the development of hubs incorporating mainstream public services and job centres could gradually guide the optimisation of spatial structures.

As for the review and allocation of programme funds, a structure akin to LEADER's Local Action Groups, comprising participatory local budget allocation through diversified review panels (including representatives from businesses of varying sizes, cooperatives, ordinary farmers, relevant experts, and party and government bodies) could be established. However, it would be advisable to limit the proportion of party members,

state-owned enterprise employees, and government officials (suggested not to exceed 50%), so as to dilute the absolute power of party-state apparatus in resource allocation decisions whilst also mitigating the impact of political tournaments on local development.

The author is acutely aware that both LEADER and the key settlement policy risk exacerbating rural development polarisation, as the distribution of relational resources and social capital is not geographically even. However, considering the Chinese central government's strong desire for control over localities and communities, as well as the limited state fiscal capabilities and willingness to fund social development, and the country's vast rural population and dispersed residential patterns, this approach may currently be the most suitable fiscal arrangement for the political-economic structure of rural China.

Beyond fiscal considerations, the thesis identifies another impediment to community-facing collaborative innovation: the excessive intervention and dominance of the government during the problematisation stage. This is not to suggest that the local government should abstain from participating in the problematisation process. However, its proactive interventions should ideally focus on repairing leadership structures and enhancing social cohesion, rather than direct involvement. Qianjiachi serves as a prime example of this approach, because the village's problematisation process for development was largely conducted from the bottom up by the community itself. The government's proactive intervention in Qianjiachi, though arguably unintended, was limited to arresting corrupt officials in the village leadership and enforcing a forced renewal of the leadership, followed by some regional road infrastructure projects. In contrast, in the development of the other two villages, government intervention in shaping the development path and vision design was deeply embedded in the problematisation process. In other words, without prior government investment and spatial planning, the villages' problematisation processes could not be autonomously initiated. This resulted in these communities playing increasingly passive roles in subsequent development stages.

Prioritising the activation of community cohesion and collective action capabilities, as well as self-governance elements comprising bonding relationships, can also provide a

measure of resistance against excessive party-state interventions. It can prevent intermediary groups, which are dependent on the party-state, from gradually morphing into interest groups within community governance, as noticed in Lanjing Village. Utilising the Janus-faced nature of these intermediary groups enables a form of soft balancing, which mitigates their potential dominance in the governance process.

In general, this final chapter has addressed the contributions of this study to Chinese rural studies and the broader field of global rural development. This research introduces to existent literature the concept of NED to conceptualise the party-led rural networked development approach that has emerged since the NRRS. It also identifies the unique governance context and practical mechanisms of the Chinese model while integrating it with existing Western-based rural development theories. In its empirical analysis, the thesis proposes an analytical framework for rural networked practices involving collaborative innovations which, it is argued can be adapted to other rural contexts. Using this framework, the empirical analysis of the thesis offered a detailed exploration of emerging Chinese rural development practices, elucidating interactions among various actors in three distinct types of villages in China, and through so doing can facilitate future global cross-contextual discussions.

Furthermore, while the thesis has clarified how the party-state logic and intermediary integration logic that nurtured NED structurally shape current challenges, it also proposes relatively moderate policy recommendations to enhance feasibility. These suggestions include:

- Advocating the growth of sectors such as agriculture, in which local communities can exert effective resource control, as opposed to industries such as tourism that depend on external investment. This approach would involve more villagers in the developmental process and encourage village leaders to more closely align their activities with the nuances of local economic growth and community needs; preventing them from being relegated to mere puppets of the party-state;

- Aiding villagers and village cadres to acquire more profound understandings of the party-state's operational mechanisms so that they may more effectively interpret policy discourses;
- Decentralising the current programme-based financing system, forming multi-stakeholder local fiscal resource review and allocation groups, mitigating the party-state's dominance, and implementing differentiated development through bidding. Villages demonstrating self-governance and bottom-up development capabilities should receive more fiscal resources and land development opportunities, while those lacking such capabilities should be provided with basic public services without being hastily relocated to urban areas;
- Government anticipatory interventions should focus more on fostering community self-governance capabilities rather than dominating the problematisation process in collaborative innovations.

The NRRS and the resultant NED possess the capacity to enhance the socio-economic status of rural societies. They represent a robust national response to the inequitable urban-rural dualist governance structure and the deprivation of rural areas by the growth machine which has been engendered by rapid urbanisation in China. The formation of a multi-actor, national-scale action network, led by a nationally-operating actor, such as the state or party, holds positive governance implications for marginalised rural localities that have been compelled into self-help under neoliberalism. However, the author asserts that unless there is a systemic change to the historical spectres which still haunt China, the country's rural development practices may continue to serve the maintenance of the party-state's legitimacy, and that the overall trend towards an institutionalisation of rural governance and everyday life may not, therefore, be altered.

In the future, the author hopes that the outcomes of this research can be utilized to foster comparative rural studies globally. Firstly, the relationship-based analytical framework adopted in this paper, especially its focus on the complex reflexive relationships between state and society, is envisioned to deconstruct the governance structures of rural societies

in countries across the Global South/East. This could guide the generation of indigenous rural development theories.

Secondly, it is worth contemplating whether the concept of the rural integration machine proposed in this study could be applied beyond China. For instance, the cohesive policy, as the European Union's principal investment policy, emphasises the socio-economic and territorial cohesion of Europe to mitigate territorial and demographic disparities, thereby “constituting obstacles to integration and development” within Europe (European Parliament, 2023, Section Context). Despite the differences between the EU’s rather loose supranational political structure and China’s tight party-state regime, as well as their divergent state-building histories, governance mechanisms within China’s rural integration machine, such as state mobilisation, proactive party roles, and programme-based policies, may resonate with some EU countries. This could offer new perspectives for interpreting the dynamics of EU rural policy implementation or provide insights and lessons for the EU to refine its policy mechanisms.

Moreover, the author believes that the NED model and the resultant rural integration machine could assist in exploring and deconstructing rural development and governance behaviours in an increasingly anti-democratic world. Over recent decades, Europe and other regions have witnessed growing support for far-right and ethno-nationalist parties. According to a recent report from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2022), democracy is currently in retreat in as many as half of the world's democracies. A similar negative trend is evident among the world's non-democracies, with half becoming significantly more repressive. This study could aid in understanding how states and parties may achieve political, social, and economic control over communities through policy means, and the potential challenges such control may face.

## References

- Adams, J., & Gaetano, A. (2010). *One country, two societies: Rural-urban inequality in contemporary China* (Vol. 16). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ahlers, A. L. & Schubert, G. (2009). 'Building a new socialist countryside: Only a political slogan?', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 38(4), pp. 36-62.
- Aiken, M., Taylor, M. and Moran, R. (2016) Always look a gift horse in the mouth: Community organisations controlling assets. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 27(4), pp. 1669–1693.
- Allmendinger, P. (2017) *Planning Theory* (3rd edition). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson, C. and Bell, M. (2003) The devil of social capital: a dilemma of American rural sociology, in Cloke, P. (ed.) *Country Visions*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Anseeuw, W. (2013). 'The rush for land in Africa: Resource grabbing or green revolution?.' *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 20(1), pp.159-177.
- Armstrong, T.J. (ed.) (1992). *Michel Foucault, Philosopher: Essays Translated From the French and German*. Routledge.
- Bairoch, P. and Goertz, G. (1986) 'Factors of Urbanisation in the Nineteenth Century Developed Countries: A Descriptive and Econometric Analysis', *Urban Studies*, 23, pp. 285-305.
- Bamboo MAZ Management Committee (2022a) *Report on the Construction of the Bamboo MAZ of Qianfen County*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Bamboo MAZ Management Committee (2022b) *Explanation on the 2021 Departmental Budget Compilation by the Bamboo MAZ Management Committee of Qianfen County*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Bell, D. A. (2023). *The Dean of Shandong: Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat at a Chinese University*.
- Birch, A. H. (2012). *Nationalism and national integration*. Routledge. City missing
- Bird, R. M., & Wong, C. P. (2005). China's fiscal system: a work in progress. *Rotman School of Management Working Paper*.
- Bo, Y. (1991) *Ruogan Zhongda Lishi Shijian Huigu [The Review of Several Important Policy Decisions and Events]*. Beijing: CPC History Press.
- Bock, B.B. (2016). 'Rural marginalisation and the role of social innovation; a turn towards nexogenous development and rural reconnection.', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 56(4), pp. 552-573.

- Bock, B.B. (2019). Rurality and multi-level governance. In Scott, M., Gallent, N. and Gkartzios, M. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Rural Planning*. London: Routledge, pp.183-191.
- Bock, B.B., Osti, G. and Ventura, F. (2016) Rural migration and new patterns of exclusion and integration in Europe. In Shucksmith, M. and Brown, D. (eds.) *International Handbook for Rural Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 71-84.
- Bockman, J. (2013). Neoliberalism. *Contexts*, 12(3), pp. 14-15.
- Bosworth, G., Annibal, I., Carroll, T., Price, L., Sellick, J., & Shepherd, J. (2016a). Empowering Local Action through Neo-Endogenous Development; The Case of LEADER in England. *Sociologia ruralis*, 56(3), 427-449.
- Bosworth, G., Rizzo, F., Marquardt, D., Strijker, D., Haartsen, T., & Aagaard Thuesen, A. (2016). Identifying social innovations in European local rural development initiatives. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 29(4), 442-461.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Greenwood Press, pp. pp. 241-258.
- Bovaird, T. (2005) 'Public governance: balancing stakeholder power in a network society', *International Review of Administrative Science*, 71(2), pp. 217-228.
- Brenner, N. and Schmid, C. (2017). 'Planetary urbanization', In Ruby, I. and Ruby, A. (eds.) *Infrastructure Space*. Berlin: Ruby Press, pp. 37-40.
- Brown, K., & Bērziņa-Čerenkova, U. A. (2018). Ideology in the era of Xi Jinping. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 23(3), pp. 323-339.
- Bryceson, D.F. (2000) Peasant Theories and Smallholder Policies. Past and Present. In Bryceson, D.F., Kay, C. and Mooij, J. (eds) *Disappearing Peasantries: Rural Labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. London: IT Publications, pp. 1-36.
- Cainey, A. & Prange, C. (2023) *XICONOMICS: What China's Dual Circulation Strategy Means for Global Business*. London: Agenda Publishing.
- Cao, F. (2009) 'Modernization Theory and China's Road to Modernization', *Chinese Studies in History*, 43(1), pp. 7-16.
- Castells, M. (1996). The space of flows. *The rise of the network society*, 1, pp.376-482.
- Castells. (2010). *The rise of the network society*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.



- Cejudo, E. and Navarro, F. (2020) *Neo-endogenous Development in European Rural Areas*. Cham: Springer.
- Chan, J., & Selden, M. (2017). The labour politics of China's rural migrant workers. *Globalizations*, 14(2), pp. 259-271.
- Chang, M. H. (1996). The Thought of Deng Xiaoping. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 29(4), pp. 377-394.
- Chen, A. (2014) 'How has the abolition of agricultural taxes transformed village governance in China? Evidence from agricultural regions.' *The China Quarterly* 219, pp. 715–735
- Chen, C. (2005). Institutional legitimacy of an authoritarian state: China in the mirror of Eastern Europe. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 52(4), pp. 3-13.
- Chen, G.Q. & Huangfu X. (2020) 'Gongnengxing fenquan: Zhongguo tese de quanli fenli tixi [Functional Separation: Power Separation System with Chinese Characteristics]', *Jianghai Xuekan*, (4).
- Chen, G.Q. (2020) 'Jingjijichu, zhengfuxingtai ji qi gongnengxing fenquan lilun' [Economic Foundation, Government Form and Functional Separation Theory], *Xueshu Yuekan*, 11, pp. 66-74.
- Chen, H. C., Knierim, A., & Bock, B. B. (2022). The emergence of social innovation in rural revitalisation practices: A comparative case study from Taiwan. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 90, pp. 134-146.
- Chen, J. & Zhang, Y. (2006) 'Tiaokuai fenge yu xiangzhen caizhen tizhi yunxing yanjiu' [Study on the mechanism of tiao-kuai segregation and town-level fiscal institution], *Qiusuo*, 7.
- Chen, M., Zhou, Y., Huang, X., & Ye, C. (2021). 'The Integration of New-Type Urbanization and Rural Revitalization Strategies in China: Origin, Reality and Future Trends.' *Land*, 10(2), 207.
- Chen, X. (2019). Forty years of rural reform in China: retrospect and future prospects. *China Agricultural Economic Review*, 11(3), pp. 460-470.
- Chen, X., & Liu, J. (2021). Village leaders, dual brokerage and political order in rural China. *The China Quarterly*, 247, pp. 662-680.
- Chien S.S (2013) 'New local state power through administrative restructuring: A case study of post-Mao China county-level urban entrepreneurialism in Kunshan.' *Geoforum* 46, pp. 103-112.

- Chuang, J. (2014). China's rural land politics: bureaucratic absorption and the muting of rightful resistance. *The China Quarterly*, 219, pp. 649-669.
- Cliff, T. (1980) *Marxism and the collectivisation of agriculture*. London: Socialists Unlimited.
- Cloke, P. & Edwards, G. (1986) Rurality in England and Wales 1981: A Replication of the 1971 Index. *Regional Studies*, 20(4), pp. 289-306.
- Cloke, P. (1977) An Index of Rurality for England and Wales. *Regional Studies*, (11), pp. 31-46.
- Cloke, P., & Shaw, D. (1983). Rural settlement policies in structure plans. *The Town Planning Review*, 54(3), 338-354.
- Conway, G. R., & Barbie, E. B. (1988). After the green revolution: sustainable and equitable agricultural development. *Futures*, 20(6), pp. 651-670.
- Cooper, R. (2018). *What is Civil Society, its role and value in 2018?*. London: UK Department for International Development.
- CPC Central Committee (2019) *Regulations of the CPC on Rural Work* [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-01/10/content\\_5356764.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-01/10/content_5356764.htm) (Accessed: 7 July 2023)
- Dargan, L., and Shucksmith, M. (2008). "LEADER and Innovation". *Sociologia Ruralis* 48 (3), pp. 274–291.
- Dax, T., Strahl, W., Kirwan, J. & Maye, D. (2016) 'The Leader programme 2007–2013: Enabling or disabling social innovation and neo-endogenous development? Insights from Austria and Ireland', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23(1), pp. 56-68.
- Day, A. (2008). 'The end of the peasant? New rural reconstruction in China.', *boundary* 2, 35(2), pp.49-73.
- Deng, H. (2023). Positioning China's state entrepreneurialism in structural coherence and multiple logics. *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research*, 27541223231188599.
- Dessein, B. (2017). Yearning for the Lost Paradise: The "Great Unity" (datong) and Its Philosophical Interpretations. *Asian studies*, 5(1), pp. 83-102.
- Dhanagare, D. N. (1987). Green revolution and social inequalities in rural India. *Economic and political weekly*, pp. 137-144.
- Ditai Town Government (2020) *Ditai: Party-led Coordination Paves the Way for Rural Revitalisation*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Ditai Town Government.

- Ditai Town Government (2021) *Stay closely aligned with the 'four major tasks' and solidly advance the 'second half' of the two reforms*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Ditai Town Government.
- Douglas, D.J.A. (2016) Power and politics in the changing structures of rural local government. In Shucksmith, M. and Brown, D. (eds.) *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 601-614.
- Duara, P. (1991). *Culture, power, and the state: rural North China, 1900-1942*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Economic Daily (2020) *Investing the rural. How can capital cultivate the land?* [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-08/19/content\\_5535731.htm](https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-08/19/content_5535731.htm) (Accessed: 17 January 2024)
- Edwards, M. (2013). *Civil society*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Elchardus, M., & De Keere, K. (2010). Institutionalizing the new self: a comparative analysis. *European Societies*, 12(5), pp. 743-764.
- Elman, B.A. (1991). 'Political, social, and cultural reproduction via civil service examinations in late imperial China.', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, pp.7-28.
- Erik, B. K. (2018). China's political order under Xi Jinping: Concepts and perspectives. *China: An International Journal*, 16(3), pp. 1-17.
- Fairbank, J.K. (1983). *The United States and China* (Vol. 10). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fei, X. (1945) *Earthbound China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fei, X., Hamilton, G.G. and Zheng, W. (1992). *From the soil: The foundations of Chinese society*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Feldman, S. P. (2021). *Dictatorship by Degrees: Xi Jinping in China*. Pennsylvania: Lexington Books.
- Feng, Y., Wu, F., & Zhang, F. (2021). Changing roles of the state in the financialization of urban development through chengtou in China. *Regional Studies*, pp. 1-12.
- Fischer, A. and McKee, A. (2017) 'A question of capacities? Community resilience and empowerment between assets, abilities and relationships.', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 54, pp. 187-197.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Penguin Books.

- Foucault, M. (1982) The Subject and Power, *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), pp. 777-795.
- Fruit MAZ Management Committee (2020) *Introduction of Fruit MAZ*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin County Government.
- Fukuyama, F. (2016). Reflections on Chinese governance. *Journal of Chinese governance*, 1(3), 379-391.
- Gao, J., Yang, J., Chen, C., & Chen, W. (2023). From 'forsaken site' to 'model village': Unraveling the multi-scalar process of rural revitalization in China. *Habitat International*, 133, 102766.
- Gerrard, J. (2017). Welfare rights, self-help and social enterprise: Unpicking neoliberalism's mess. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(1), pp. 47-62.
- Gkartzios, M. and Lowe, P. (2019) Revisiting Neo-Endogenous Rural Development, in: Scott, M., Gallent, N. and Gkartzios, M. (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Rural Planning*, Routledge: New York.
- Gkartzios, M., Gallent, N., & Scott, M. (2022). *Rural places and planning: Stories from the global countryside*. Policy Press.
- Glazer, N. and Moynihan, D.P. (1963) *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Cambridge MA: Harvard and MIT Presses
- Goodwin M. (1998). The governance of rural areas: some emerging research issues and agendas. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 14(1), pp. 5–12.
- Goodwin-Hawkins, B., Oedl-Wieser, T., Ovaska, U., & Morse, A. (2021). Rural service hubs and socially innovative rural-urban linkages: A conceptual framework for nexogenous development. *Local Economy*, 36(7-8), pp. 551-568.
- Gordon, C. (1991). 'Governmental rationality: An introduction.' In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault effect studies in governmentality*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Graeme, S. (2018). The campaign rolls on: Rural governance in China under Xi Jinping and the war on poverty. *China: An International Journal*, 16(3), pp. 163-178.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). 'The strength of weak ties'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), pp. 1360-1380.
- Gui, Y.L. & He, C.H. (2021) 'Xiangcun jianshe shijiao xia de xiangcun zhili moshi yanjiu' [Research on Rural Governance Model from the Perspective of Rural Construction], *Xibu Renjuhuanjing Xuekan*, 36(1), pp. 26-34.
- Guo, B. (2020). A partocracy with Chinese characteristics: Governance system reform under Xi Jinping. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(126), pp. 809-823.

- Guo, S., & Guo, B. (Eds.). (2008). *China in search of a harmonious society*. Lexington Books.
- Guo, Z., Hong, L., Qiao, J. & Milbourn, P. (2019) 'Yingguo xiangcun fenlei yanjiu ji dui woguo de qishi' [Rural classification in the UK and its enlightenment to China], *Chengshiguihua*, 43(3), pp.75-81.
- Gyourko, J., Shen, Y., Wu, J., & Zhang, R. (2022). Land finance in China: Analysis and review. *China Economic Review*, 101868.
- Han, C. (2014) *Guowuyuan guanyu tuijin Xinnongcunjianshe gongzuo qingkuang de baogao* [The Report of State Council on Promoting New Countryside Construction]. Beijing: State Council.
- Harvey, D. (2005) *Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2006). *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Development*. London: Verso.
- Hayes, A. (2020). Interwoven 'Destinies': The significance of Xinjiang to the China dream, the belt and road initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(121), pp. 31-45.
- He, B. (2014). From village election to village deliberation in rural China: Case study of a deliberative democracy experiment. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 19, pp. 133-150.
- He, S., Liu, Y., Webster, C., & Wu, F. (2009). Property rights redistribution, entitlement failure and the impoverishment of landless farmers in China. *Urban studies*, 46(9), pp. 1925-1949.
- He, X. (2008). The regional variation of rural governance and the logics of peasant action. *Chinese Sociology & Anthropology*, 41(1), pp. 10-29.
- He, X. (2011) 'Lun liyimijixing nongcun diqu de cunji zhili' [Rural community governance of interest-intensive area], *Zhengzhixue Yanjiu*, pp. 47-56.
- He, X. (2012) 'Lun Zhongguo nongcun de quyue chayi: cunzhuang shehui jiegou de shijiao' [Differentiated rural China: from view of rural social structure], *Kaifang Shidai*, (10), pp. 107-129.
- He, X. (2015) Lun zhong jian nong min [Discussion on Chinese 'mid' farmers], *Nanjing Nong Ye Da Xue Xue Bao*, (4), p.7
- He, X. (2017) 'Xiangcun zhili xiandaihua: cunzhuang yu tizhi' [Rural governance modernization: village and institution], *Qiusuo*, (10), pp. 4-10.

- He, X. (2019a) 'Xingzheng haishi zizhi: cunji zhili xiang hechuqu' [Administration or autonomy: where to go for village level governance], *Huazhou Nongye Daxue Xuebao*, 144(6).
- He, X. (2019b) 'Xiangcunzhenxing yu nongcun jitijingji' [Rural revitalisation and rural collective economy], *Wuhan Daxue Xuebao*, 72(4), pp. 185-192.
- He, X. (2021). *Improving village governance in contemporary China*. Buckinghamshire: Brill.
- He, X. (2022). *Northern and Southern China: Regional Differences in Rural Areas*. Routledge.
- Heberer, T., & Göbel, C. (2011). *The politics of community building in urban China*. Taylor & Francis.
- Hechter, M. (1977). *Internal colonialism: The Celtic fringe in British national development, 1536-1966*. University of California Press.
- Heilmann, S. (2018). *Red swan: how unorthodox policy making facilitated China's rise*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Hindess, B. (2005). 'Politics as government: Michel Foucault's analysis of political reason.' *Alternatives*, 30(4), pp. 389-413.
- Ho, S., Dong, X., Bowles, P. & MacPhail, F. (2002) Privatisation and Enterprise Wage Structures During Transition: Evidence from Rural Industry in China, *Economics of Transition*, 10(3)
- Horsley, J. P. (2019). *Party leadership and rule of law in the Xi Jinping era, What does an ascendant Chinese Communist Party mean for China's legal development?*. Brookings Institution.
- Hsiao, K.C. (1960) *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Hu, C. (2022) Constructing a liveable and employable harmonious and beautiful countryside. *People's Daily*. [Online.] Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2022-11/15/content\\_5727004.htm](https://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2022-11/15/content_5727004.htm) (Accessed: 28 September 2023).
- Hu, R. (2001). *Lixing xuanze yu zhidu shishi: zhongguo nongcun cunmin weiyuanhui xuanju degean yanjiu* [The rational choices and institutional implementation: Case study of VC elections in rural China]. Shanghai: Shanghai Far East Press.
- Huang, D., & Chan, R. C. (2018). On 'Land Finance' in urban China: theory and practice. *Habitat International*, 75, pp. 96-104.

- Huang, J. (2014). Building a Shared and Harmonious Society in China: An ethnic minority perspective. *Development*, 57(1), pp. 77-83.
- Huang, P. C. (2002). Development or involution in eighteenth-century Britain and China? A Review of Kenneth Pomeranz's the great divergence: China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61(2), pp. 501-538.
- Huang, P. C. (2019). Rethinking “the Third Sphere”: The dualistic unity of state and society in China, past and present. *Modern China*, 45(4), 355-391.
- Huang, P.C. (2002). Development or Involution in Eighteenth-Century Britain and China? A Review of Kenneth Pomeranz's "The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61(2), pp.501-538.
- Huang, P.C. (2008). ‘Centralized Minimalism: Semiformal Governance by Quasi–Officials and Dispute Resolution in China,’ *Modern China*, 34, 1.
- Huang, P.C. (2021) ‘Agricultural Involution and Bureaucratic Involution: Types, Concepts, Empirical Generalizations, and Theoretical Mechanisms’, *Rural China*, 18.
- Huang, P.C., Gong, W.G. & Gao, Y. (2014) “‘Xiangmuzhi” de yunzuoji zhi he xiaoguo shi “helihua” ma?’ [Are the mechanism and outcome of program-led governance rationalised?], *Kaifang Shidai*, (5), pp. 142-159.
- Huang, Y. (2008a). *Capitalism with Chinese characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the state*. Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, P. C. (2008b). In Search of a Chinese Modernity: Wang Hui's The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought. *Modern China*, 34(3), 396-404.
- Hui, E. C. M., Bao, H. J., & Zhang, X. L. (2013). ‘The policy and praxis of compensation for land expropriations in China: An appraisal from the perspective of social exclusion’, *Land Use Policy*, 32, pp. 309-316.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2022). *The global state of democracy 2022: Forging social contracts in a time of discontent*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2022-11/the-global-state-of-democracy-2022.pdf> (Accessed: 14 March 2024)
- Isserman, A.M., Feser, E. and Warren, D.E. (2009) ‘Why some rural places prosper and others do not’, *International Regional Science Review*, 32, pp. 300-342.
- Jacobs, L., Guopei, G., & Herbig, P. (1995). Confucian roots in China: a force for today's business. *Management Decision*, 33(10), pp. 29-34.

- Jiang, L., Jiang, H. & Jiang, H. (2021) 'New Ideas and Measures to Promote the Development of National Modern Agricultural Industrial Park During the 14th Five-Year Plan Period', *Reform*, 12, pp. 106-115. (In Chinese)
- Jiang, L., Jiang, H. & Jiang, H. (2021) 'The new ideas and measures for promoting the development of national modern agricultural zones during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period', *Gai Ge*, 12(10), pp. 106-115.
- Jiang, Y. & Waley, P. (2020), Who Builds Cities in China? How Urban Investment and Development Companies Have Transformed Shanghai. *Int. J. Urban Reg.*, 44, pp. 636-651.
- Jin, C. (2017). *An economic analysis of the rise and decline of Chinese township and village enterprises*. Springer International Publishing.
- Jing, Y. (2016) Jindai xiang-li zhidu zhuanxing zhongde gongquan xiatan xianxiang jixi [The penetration of state force inside the contemporary Xiang-Li system], *Dongyue Luncong*, 37(1), pp. 174-179.
- Jing, Y., Chen, M. & Xiao, B. (2016) *Dang Dai Zhong Guo Zheng Fu yu Zheng Zhi* [Contemporary Chinese Government and Politics]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Kan, K. (2016). 'The transformation of the village collective in urbanising China: A historical institutional analysis.', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 47, pp. 588-600.
- Katona-Kovács, J., High, C., & Nemes, G. (2011). 'Importance of Animation Actions in the Operation of Hungarian Local Action Groups', *European Countryside*, 3(4), pp. 227-240
- Kautsky, K. (1988, original 1899) *The Agrarian Question*. London: Zwan Publications.
- Kennedy, J. (2007) 'From the tax-for-fee reform to the abolition of agricultural taxes: the impact on township governments in north-west China.', *The China Quarterly* 189, pp. 43-59.
- Kerr, R. B. (2012). Lessons from the old Green Revolution for the new: Social, environmental and nutritional issues for agricultural change in Africa. *Progress in Development Studies*, 12(2-3), pp. 213-229.
- Kirk, P., & Shutte, A. M. (2004). Community leadership development. *Community development journal*, 39(3), pp. 234-251.
- Knight, J. (2016). The societal cost of China's rapid economic growth. *Asian Economic Papers*, 15(2), pp. 138-159.
- Kostka, G., & Zhang, C. (2018). Tightening the grip: environmental governance under Xi Jinping. *Environmental Politics*, 27(5), pp. 769-781.



- Kuhn, T. (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Labianca, M., et al., (2020). 'Social Innovation, Territorial Capital and LEADER Experiences in Andalusia (Spain) and in Molise (Italy).', In Cejudo, E. and Navarro, F. (eds.) *Neoendogenous Development in European Rural Areas* (pp. 111-131). Springer, Cham.
- Lanjing Village Committee (2022a) *Basic information of Lanjing Village of Qianfen*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Lanjing Village Committee.
- Lanjing Village Committee (2022b) *Characteristic and spotlight work of Lanjing Village of Qianfen*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Lanjing Village Committee.
- Lardy, N. R. (2019). *The state strikes back: The end of economic reform in China?*. Peterson Institute for International Economics.
- LaRocco, L.A. (2022) 'China, 'factory of the world,' is losing more of its manufacturing and export dominance, latest data shows', *CNBC*, Available from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/20/china-factory-of-the-world-is-losing-its-manufacturing-dominance.html>. (Accessed: 5 July 2023)
- Sturzaker, J. & Law, A. (2015) 'The rising Chinese middle class and the construction of a new countryside', In Verdini, G., Wang, Y. & Zhang, X.N. (eds.) *Conceiving the rural fringe in urbanising China. Actors, dimensions and management challenges*. London: Ashgate.
- Leutert, W. (2018). Firm Control. Governing the State-owned Economy Under Xi Jinping. *China Perspectives*, 2018(2018/1-2), pp. 27-36.
- Leutert, W., & Eaton, S. (2021). Deepening not departure: Xi Jinping's governance of China's state-owned economy. *The China Quarterly*, 248(S1), pp. 200-221.
- Li, C., Wang, M., & Song, Y. (2018). 'Vulnerability and livelihood restoration of landless households after land acquisition: Evidence from peri-urban China.', *Habitat International*, 79, pp. 109-115.
- Li, H. & Zhou, L.A. (2005) Political turnover and economic performance: The incentive role of personnel control in China. *Journal of Public Economics* 89(9-10), pp. 1743-1762.
- Li, J.R. & Shen, Y. (2020) Xiangmujincun yu xiangcun gonggongpin gongji bupingheng [The imbalance between rural program governance and public good provision], *Sichuan Shifan Daxue Xuebao*, 47(2), pp. 62-71.

- Li, L., Wang, X. & Miao, D. (2009) Xinchuantongzhuyi ji qihou: danweizhi de shijiao yu fenxi [Behind Neo-traditionalism: the analysis from the perspective of unit], *Jilin Daxue Shehuikexue Xuebao*, 6.
- Li, M., & Yang, R. (2013). Interrogating institutionalized establishments: Urban–rural inequalities in China’s higher education. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 14, pp. 315-323.
- Li, P. (2005). The Puzzle of China's Township–Village Enterprises: The Paradox of Local Corporatism in a Dual-Track Economic Transition. *Management and Organization Review*, 1(2), pp.197-224.
- Li, P. (2006) *Zhongguo Zhengfujian Caizheng Guanxi Tujie* [The Diagram-based Illustration of Chinese inter-government Fiscal Relations]. Beijing: China Financial & Economic Publishing House.
- Li, X.J., Guo, R.Z., Wang, J.G. & Zhang, J. (eds.) (2019) *Zhongguo Xian(Shi)yu Chengzhenhua Yanjiu* [Research on the County-level Urbanisation in China]. Beijing: China Architecture & Building Press.
- Li, Y., Westlund, H., Zheng, X. and Liu, Y. (2016) ‘Bottom-up initiatives and revival in the face of rura decline” case studies from China and Sweden’, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 47, pp. 506-513.
- Li, Y.H. & Wang, H. (2020) ‘Zhongguo renkou kongxincun yu shixincun kongjian fenbu: laizi disanci nongyepucha xingzhengcun chouyang de zhengju’ [Spatial Distribution of Rural Population Flow at the Village Level in China: Evidence from Village Samples in the Third National Agricultural Census], *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, (4), pp. 124-144.
- Li, Z.P. (2013) ‘Xiangmujincun yu xiangcun zhili chonggou’ [Projects in villages and reshaping of rural governance: taking “villages” as analysing unit], *Zhongguo Nongcun Guancha*, 112(4), pp. 1-13.
- Lianyin County Government (2017) *Municipal Government Notice on the Establishment of the Characteristic Countryside Construction Joint Conference*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin Government.
- Lianyin County Government (2018) *The Revision of Lianyin Land-use Plan (2006-2020)*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin County Government.
- Lianyin County Government (2020) *The first phase of Caoqiu Hejian Future City in Lianyin, Chenjun, will take shape next year*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin County Government.
- Lianyin Economic Development Zone (2023) *Report on the Execution of the Fiscal Budget in Xingshang Town in 2022 and the Draft Fiscal Budget for 2023*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin Economic Development Zone.

- Lianyin Finance Bureau (2021) *Lianyin Finance: Build colourful Caoqiu Rural Complex and paint new picture for rural revitalisation*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin Finance Bureau.
- Lianyin Finance Bureau (2022) *Report on the Execution of the Fiscal Budget in Lianyin County in 2021 and the Draft Fiscal Budget for 2022*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin People's Congress.
- Lianyin Statistical Bureau (2022) *National Economic and Social Development Statistical Communique of Qianfen County 2021*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Lianyin Government.
- Lieberthal, K. (2004). *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Lim, K. F. (2019). *On shifting foundations: State rescaling, policy experimentation and economic restructuring in post-1949 China*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Lin, J. Y. (1988). The household responsibility system in China's agricultural reform: a theoretical and empirical study. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 36(S3), S199-S224.
- Lin, N. (2011). Capitalism in China: A centrally managed capitalism (CMC) and its future. *Management and Organization Review*, 7(1), pp. 63-96.
- Lin, Z.C. (1996) 'Xiangzhen Qiye Xina Shengyu Laodongli Fenxi' [The analysis on TVE's absorption of labour surplus]. *Zhongguo Laodong Kexue*, (8), pp.18-19.
- Liu, A. P. (1991). Economic reform, mobility strategies, and national integration in China. *Asian Survey*, 393-408.
- Liu, S.D. (2003) *Zhanyou, Renzhi yu Renjiguanxi: dui Zhongguo xiangcun zhidubianqian de jingjishehuixue fenxi* [Possession, Recognition and Personal Network: An Eco-sociological Analysis of Institutional Change in China]. Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House.
- Liu, Y. et al., (2014). Implications of land-use change in rural China: A case study of Yucheng, Shandong province. *Land Use Policy*, 40, pp. 111-118.
- Liu, Y., & Zhou, Y. (2021). Territory spatial planning and national governance system in China. *Land Use Policy*, 102, 105288.
- Liu, Y., Fang, F., & Li, Y. (2014). Key issues of land use in China and implications for policy making. *Land Use Policy*, 40, pp. 6-12.
- Liu, Y., Liu, Y., Chen, Y., & Long, H. (2010). The process and driving forces of rural hollowing in China under rapid urbanization. *Journal of Geographical Sciences*, 20, pp. 876-888.

- Liu, Y., Zang, Y. & Yang, Y. (2020) 'China's rural revitalization and development: Theory, technology and management'. *Journal of Geographical Sciences*. 30, pp. 1923–1942.
- Long, H., Li, Y., Liu, Y., Woods, M., & Zou, J. (2012). Accelerated restructuring in rural China fueled by 'increasing vs. decreasing balance' land-use policy for dealing with hollowed villages. *Land use policy*, 29(1), pp. 11-22.
- Long, H., Liu, Y., Li, X., & Chen, Y. (2010). Building new countryside in China: A geographical perspective. *Land use policy*, 27(2), pp. 457-470.
- Lowe, P. et al., (1998). *Participation in rural development: a review of European experience*. Centre for Rural Economy. Newcastle: Center of Rural Economy in Newcastle University.
- Lowe, P., Murdoch, J. & Ward, N. (1995) 'Networks in Rural Development: Beyond Exogenous and Endogenous Models.', In van der Ploeg, J.D. & van Dijk, G. (eds.) *Beyond Modernisation: the impact of endogenous rural development*. Netherlands: Uitgeverij Van Gorcum, pp. 87-105.
- Lu, X. (2018) Zhongguo Gudai Xiang-Li Kongzhi Tixi de Jiben Jiegou [The Basic Structure of Xiang-Li Controlling System of Ancient China], *Nanguo Xueshu*, 4, pp. 562-574.
- Lu, X. (2019) 'Xia Xian de Huangquan: Zhongguo Gudai Xiangli Zhidu ji qi Shizhi' [The Imperial Power Permeating Below the County-level: The Township-village System in Ancient China and its Essence], *Beijing Daxue Xuebao*, 56(4), pp.74-86.
- Luo, Z. (2020) 'Xinxing Tianyuanchengshi: Yidonghulianwang shidai de chengzhenhua lilun chonggou' [E-garden city: reconstruction of urbanisation theory in the mobile internet era]. *Chengshiguohua*, (3), pp. 9-16.
- Luo, Z., & Qiao, Y. (2021). New Countryside in the Internet Age: The Development and Planning of E-Commerce Taobao Villages in China. In Bian, L., Tang, Y. & Shen, Z. (eds.) *Chinese Urban Planning and Construction*, Cham: Springer, pp. 245-273.
- Luo, Z., Hu, X., Li, M., Yang, J., & Wen, C. (2019). Centralization or decentralization of environmental governance—evidence from China. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 6938.
- Ma, H. & Pang, L. (2010). 'Zhongguo Xianji Caizheng Zhidu de Lishibianqian yu Gaigesilu' [Changes of county finance system in history and thoughts about reform]. *Hunan Shifan Daxue Shehui Kexue Xuebao*, 39(5), pp.108-111.
- Mao, Z. (1949) Long live the great unity of the Chinese People. In *declaration of the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference* (Vol. 30).
- Marsden, T. et al., (1993) *Constructing the Countryside: An Approach to Rural Development*. London: Routledge.

- Mazzucato, M. (2018) *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy*, Penguin: London
- McCarthy, J. (2008). 'Rural geography: Globalizing the countryside', *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(1), pp.129–137.
- McRae, K.D. (1979). 'The Plural Society and the Western Political Tradition', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, pp.675-688.
- Meador, J. E. (2019). Reaching rural: Identifying implicit social networks in community development programmes. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 68, pp. 285-295.
- Ministry of Agriculture (2017). *The Notice on Developing National Modern Agricultural Zone*. Beijing: MoA and MoF. (In Chinese)
- Ministry of Agriculture (2017a). *Guanyu kaizhan guojia xiandainongye chanyeyuan chuangjiangongzuo de tongzhi [The Notice on Developing National Modern Agricultural Zone]*. Beijing: MoA and MoF.
- Ministry of Agriculture (2017b). *National Development Plan of Agricultural Product Processing and Integrated Development Plan of Rural Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Industries (2016-2020)*. Beijing: MoA.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) (2019) *Guowuyuan guanyu xiangcun chanye fazhan qingkuang de baogao. [The State Council Report on The Development of Rural Business.]* Beijing: NPC.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) (2023) *Institutional Functions*. Available from: <http://www.moa.gov.cn/jq/> (Accessed: 7 July 2023).
- Ministry of Finance (2012) *Improvement of Rural Investment by Central State*. Beijing: MoF.
- Misztal, B.A. (1996) *Trust in Modern Societies: The Search for the Bases of Social Order*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Molotch, H. (1976). The city as a growth machine: Toward a political economy of place. *American journal of sociology*, 82(2), pp. 309-332.
- Moseley, M. (1997) New Directions in Rural Community Development. *Built Environment* 23 pp. 201-209
- Murdoch, J. (2006) 'Networking rurality: emergent complexity in the countryside', In Marsden, T., Cloke, P., and Mooney, P. (eds.) *Handbook of Rural Studies*, London: SAGE, pp. 171-184.
- Murdoch, J., Lowe, P., Ward, N. & Marsden, T. (2003) *The Differentiated Countryside*. London: Routledge.

- Murdoch, J., Pratt, A.C., (1993). Rural studies: modernism, postmodernism and the 'post-rural.' *Journal of rural studies* 9, pp. 411–427.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2019) *The 3<sup>rd</sup> China Agricultural Census*. Beijing: China Statistics Press.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Urban-rural household income situation*. [Online]. Available from: [http://zjzd.stats.gov.cn/dcsj/ndsj\\_2174/2019\\_ndsj/cxjmsz/202003/t20200313\\_96495.html](http://zjzd.stats.gov.cn/dcsj/ndsj_2174/2019_ndsj/cxjmsz/202003/t20200313_96495.html) (Accessed 1 July 2023)
- National Bureau of Statistics (2021a) *National Statistical Yearbook 2020*. Beijing: China Statistics Press.
- National Bureau of Statistics (2021b) *The National Fiscal Revenue and Expenditure in 2020*. [Online]. [http://gks.mof.gov.cn/tongjishuju/202101/t20210128\\_3650522.htm](http://gks.mof.gov.cn/tongjishuju/202101/t20210128_3650522.htm) (Accessed: 22 March 2020)
- National Bureau of Statistics (2022) *China Rural Statistical Yearbook 2021*. Beijing: China Statistics Press.
- National People's Congress (2017) *Law on Rural Professional Cooperative* [Online]. Available from: [http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/npc/xinwen/2017-12/27/content\\_2035707.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/npc/xinwen/2017-12/27/content_2035707.htm) (Accessed: 9 July 2023)
- National People's Congress (2021) *Law on Promoting Rural Revitalisation* [Online]. Available from: <http://www.npc.gov.cn/npc/c30834/202104/8777a961929c4757935ed2826ba967fd.shtml> (Accessed: 7 July 2023)
- National People's Congress (2023) *Law on Rural Collective Economic Organisations* [Online]. Available from: [https://npcobserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Rural-Collective-Economic\\_Organizations-Law-Draft.pdf](https://npcobserver.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Rural-Collective-Economic_Organizations-Law-Draft.pdf) (Accessed: 9 July 2023)
- Naughton, B. J., & Yang, D. L. (Eds.). (2004). *Holding China together: Diversity and national integration in the post-Deng era*. Cambridge University Press.
- Navarro, F. et al., (2018) 'Interpretations of innovation in rural development. The cases of leader projects in Lecce (Italy) and Granada (Spain) in 2007–2013 period.', *European Countryside*. 10(1), pp.107-126.
- Navarro, F., Woods, M. and Cejudo, E. (2016). 'The LEADER initiative has been a victim of its own success. The decline of the bottom-up approach in rural development programmes. The cases of Wales and Andalusia.' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 56(2), pp.270-288.

- Neumeier, S. (2012) 'Why do Social Innovations in Rural Development Matter and Should They be Considered More Seriously in Rural Development Research? – Proposal for a Stronger Focus on Social Innovations in Rural Development Research.', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 52(1), pp. 48-69.
- Neumeier, S. (2017) 'Social innovation in rural development: identifying the key factors of success', *The Geographical Journal*, 183(1), pp. 34-36.
- Nolan, P. & Dong, F. (1990) *Market Forces in China: Competition and Small Business—the Wenzhou Debate*. London: Zed Books.
- Nordberg, K., Mariussen, Å., & Virkkala, S. (2020). Community-driven social innovation and quadruple helix coordination in rural development. Case study on LEADER group Aktion Österbotten. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 79, 157-168.
- O'Brien, K. J., & Li, L. (2000). Accommodating “democracy” in a one-party state: Introducing village elections in China. *The China Quarterly*, 162 , 465–489.
- Oi, J.C, and S. Rozelle. (2000). Elections and power: The locus of decision-making in Chinese villages. *China Quarterly* June: 513–539
- Oi, J.C. (1985) Communism and clientelism: rural politics in China. *World Politics* 37(2):238–266
- Oi, J.C. (1989) *State and peasant in contemporary China: the political economy of village government*. University of California Press, Berkeley
- Oi, J.C. (1992) 'Fiscal reform and the economic foundations of local state corporatism in China.', *World Politics*, 45, pp. 99-126.
- Ong, L. H. (2018). “Thugs-for-Hire”: Subcontracting of state coercion and state capacity in China. *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(3), 680-695.
- Orange MAZ Management Committee (2020) *Explanation on the 2019 Departmental Budget Compilation by the Orange MAZ Management Committee of Qianfen County*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Orange MAZ Management Committee (2022a) *Explanation on the 2021 Departmental Budget Compilation by the Orange MAZ Management Committee of Qianfen County*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Orange MAZ Management Committee (2022b) *Report on the Performance Evaluation of the Orange MAZ of Qianfen County for Sichuan Five-star MAZ*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y., & Tucci, C. L. (2005). Clarifying business models: Origins, present, and future of the concept. *Communications of the association for information systems*, 16(1), pp.1-25.

- Osti, G. (2000). 'LEADER and partnerships: the case of Italy.' *Sociologia ruralis*, 40(2), pp.172-180.
- Paik, W., & Lee, K. (2012). I Want To Be Expropriated!: the politics of xiaochanquanfang land development in suburban China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 21(74), pp. 261-279.
- Pallot, J., 1979. Rural settlement planning in the USSR. *Soviet Studies* 31, 214–230.
- Palumbo, A. (2017). *From government to governance*. Routledge.
- Pan, F., Zhang, F., Zhu, S., & Wójcik, D. (2017). Developing by borrowing? Inter-jurisdictional competition, land finance and local debt accumulation in China. *Urban Studies*, 54(4), pp. 897-916.
- Papadopoulou, E., Hasanagas, N. and Harvey, D. (2011) 'Analysis of rural development policy networks in Greece: Is LEADER really different?' *Land Use Policy* 28(4), pp. 663–673.
- Peck J (2023) Practicing conjunctural methodologies: Engaging Chinese capitalism. *Dialogues in Human Geography*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206231154346>
- People's Daily (2012) *In 2011, the actual investment from the central government's finance in the San Nong sector reached 1,040.86 billion yuan*. [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-01/08/content\\_2039095.htm](https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-01/08/content_2039095.htm) (Accessed: 8 July 2023)
- Petrick, M. (2015). 'Between Individual Autonomy and Centralized Control: Outlining an Evolutionary Model of Neo-endogenous Rural Development.' In *Evolutionary Governance Theory* (pp. 247-265). Springer, Cham.
- Pines, Y. (2000). The One That Pervades the All" in Ancient Chinese Political thought: The Origins of" The Great Unity" Paradigm. *T'oung Pao*, 86(Fasc. 4/5), pp. 280-324.
- Pines, Y., Biran, M., & Rüpke, J. (2021). Limits of all-under-heaven: ideology and praxis of 'great unity'in early Chinese Empire. *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, pp. 79-110.
- Powell, F. (2000). State, welfare and civil society. In *Trust and Civil Society* (pp. 90-110). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Procuratorate Daily (2020) *Decisive Battle Against Organized Crime and Evil | Heavy Strikes Against 'Village Bullies' to Consolidate the Foundation of Regime - The Special Campaign to Combat Organized Crime and Evil Eliminates 1198 Criminal Organizations in Rural Areas*. [Online]. Available from: [https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/zdgz/202012/t20201219\\_489349.shtml](https://www.spp.gov.cn/spp/zdgz/202012/t20201219_489349.shtml) (Accessed: 18 January 2024)



- Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1993). *Making democracy work*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton university press.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Qi, J., Zheng, X., & Guo, H. (2019). 'The formation of Taobao villages in China.' *China economic review*, 53, pp. 106-127.
- Qian, C. (2010). 'Transformation of European States: From Feudal to Modern'. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(5), pp.6683-6691.
- Qian, Y & Weingast, B.R. (1997) 'Federalism as a commitment to market incentives.', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 11(4), pp.83-92.
- Qian, Y. & Xu, C.G. (1993). 'Why China's economic reforms differ: the M-form hierarchy and entry/expansion of the non-state sector.' *Economics of Transition*, 1(2), pp. 135-170.
- Qianfen County Government (2019) *Enterprise + Production base: the story to help alleviate poverty*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Qianfen County Government (2021) *Pre-approval public announcement regarding the village planning of Lanjing Village*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Qianfen Finance Bureau (2022) *Report on the Execution of the Fiscal Budget in Qianfen County in 2021 and the Draft Fiscal Budget for 2022*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen People's Congress.
- Qianfen Statistical Bureau (2022) *National Economic and Social Development Statistical Communique of Qianfen County 2021*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianfen County Government.
- Qianjiachi Village Committee (2020) *Proposal on exploring interest coupling mechanism among smallholders by Qianjiachi Orange Industrial Cooperative*, Qianfen. Maozhan, Sichuan: Qianjiachi Village Committee.
- Qianjiachi Village Committee (2022) *Basic information of Qianjiachi Village of Qianfen*. Maozhan, Sichuan: Lanjing Village Committee.
- Qin, H. (2003) *Chuantong Shilun: bentu shehui de zhidu, wenhua jiqi biange* [Ten essays on chinese tradition: the institution, culture and reform of native society.] Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
- Qu, J. D. (2012) 'The project system: a new form of state governance', *Social Sciences in China*, 33(4), pp. 28-47.

- Qun, W., Yongle, L., & Siqi, Y. (2015). The incentives of China's urban land finance. *Land Use Policy*, 42, pp. 432-442.
- Rabushka, A. and Shepsle, K.A. (2009). *Politics in plural societies : a theory of democratic instability*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Rami, A. A. M., Abdullah, R., & Ibrahim, A. (2016). The community leaders as a catalyst for rural community development in the state of Terengganu. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 6(12), pp.2222-6990.
- Ray, C. (2000) 'The EU LEADER Programme: rural development laboratory', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(2), pp. 163-171.
- Ray, C. (2006) 'Neo-endogenous rural development in the EU', In Cloke, P., Marsden, T. and Mooney, P. (eds.) *The Handbook of Rural Studies*. London: SAGE Publication.
- Ren, J. (2023). Exceptionalism and theorizing spatial inequality: Segregation research on cities in China. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 45(7), 1225-1237.
- Ren, X. (2017). 'Land acquisition, rural protests, and the local state in China and India', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 35(1), PP. 25-41.
- Ren, Y., Bian, Y., & He, T. (2017). Characterizing the land shareholding cooperative: A case study of Shanglin village in Jiangsu, China. *Sustainability*, 9(7), 1175.
- Rhodes, R. (1997) *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Rhodes, R.A.W. (1996). The new governance: governing without government. *Political Studies*. XLIV: 652–667.
- Richter, R., Fink, M., Lang, R. and Maresch, D. (2019). *Social entrepreneurship and innovation in rural Europe*. Routledge.
- Rittel, H.W. and Webber, M.M. (1973). 'Dilemmas in a general theory of planning', *Policy sciences*, 4(2), pp.155-169.
- Rogelja, T., Ludvig, A., Weiss, G., Prah, J., Shannon, M., & Secco, L. (2023). Analyzing social innovation as a process in rural areas: Key dimensions and success factors for the revival of the traditional charcoal burning in Slovenia. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 97, pp. 517-533.
- Rudd, K. (2022). The World according to Xi Jinping: What China's Ideologue in Chief Really Believes. *Foreign Affairs*, 101, p.8.
- Rutakumwa, R., Mugisha, J. O., Bernays, S., Kabunga, E., Tumwekwase, G., Mbonye, M., & Seeley, J. (2020). Conducting in-depth interviews with and without voice recorders: a comparative analysis. *Qualitative Research*, 20(5), pp. 565-581.

- Sagers, J. (2020). [Review of the book Dictatorship by Degrees: Xi Jinping in China, by Steven P. Feldman]. *China Review International* 27(1), pp. 17-20.
- Sandby-Thomas, P. (2014). Stability overwhelms everything. *Discourse, Politics and Media in Contemporary China*, 54, 47.
- Sargeson, S. (2013). Violence as development: land expropriation and China's urbanization. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40(6), pp. 1063-1085.
- Schumpeter, J. (1934). *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest and the Business Cycle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard College.
- Scott, M. (2013). 'Resilience: a conceptual lens for rural studies?', *Geography compass*, 7(9), pp.597-610.
- Shen, D.F. (2014) Zhili zhuanxing xia cunganbu bushenren nanti: jianlun xiangshen moshi de zhongjie [Incompetence issues of village cadres under the governance transition: the end of gentry mode], *Tansuo yu Zhengming*, (7), pp. 90-93.
- Shen, J. (2005) Space, scale and the state: reorganizing urban space in China. In: Ma L.J & Wu, F. (eds) *Restructuring the Chinese City: changing society, economy and space*. Routledge, London and New York, pp 34–51.
- Shen, M. & Shen, J. (2018) 'Governing the countryside through state-led programmes: A case study of Jiangning District in Nanjing', China, *Urban Studies*, 55(7), pp. 1439-1459.
- Shen, M. & Zhang, J. (2019) 'Zhengfu zhudaoxing xiangcun jianshe zhong de gonggongchanpin gongji wenti yu kechixu xiangcun zhili' [Toward a Sustainable Rural Governance? The Public Goods Provision in Question Amidst the State-led Rural Construction in China], *Guoji Chengshiguohua*.
- Shen, M. (2020). *Rural Revitalization Through State-led Programs*. Singapore: Springer.
- Shen, Y., Yu, J., & Zhou, J. (2020). The Administration's retreat and the Party's advance in the new era of xi Jinping: The politics of the ruling party, the government, and associations in China. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 25, pp. 71-88.
- Shengxiang Village Committee (2020) *Information card of Shengxiang Village*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Shengxiang Village Committee.
- Shengxiang Village Committee (2022) *Thematic report: Story of Internet Influencer Village: Transition from unknown village to beautiful countryside*. Chenjun, Jiangsu: Shengxiang Village Committee.
- Shih, V., Adolph, C., & Liu, M. (2012). Getting ahead in the communist party: explaining the advancement of central committee members in China. *American political science review*, 106(1), pp. 166-187.

- Shiva, V. (1991) *The violence of the green revolution: third world agriculture, ecology and politics*. Zed Books.
- Shucksmith, M. (2000). 'Endogenous development, social capital and social inclusion: Perspectives from LEADER in the UK.', *Sociologia ruralis*, 40(2), pp. 208-218.
- Shucksmith, M., (2010). 'Disintegrated rural development? Neo-endogenous rural development, planning and place-shaping in diffused power contexts.', *Sociologia ruralis*, 50(1), pp.1-14.
- Shue, V. (2018). Party-state, nation, empire: rethinking the grammar of Chinese governance. *Journal of Chinese Governance*, 3(3), pp. 268-291.
- Shue, V. (1988) *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sichuan Circle Science and Technology Company (2019) *Environmental impact assessment report for the Varnova Bamboo Industrial Park's million-ton bamboo biomass refining project*. Chengdu, Sichuan: Sichuan Circle Science and Technology Company.
- Sicular, T., Ximing, Y., Gustafsson, B., & Shi, L. (2007). The urban–rural income gap and inequality in China. *Review of income and wealth*, 53(1), pp. 93-126.
- Singh, G., & Singh, J. (2006). Green revolution and economic plight of agricultural labour in Punjab. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 49(4), pp. 855-862.
- Sirayi, M., Kanyane, M., & Verdini, G. (Eds.). (2021). *Culture and rural–urban revitalisation in South Africa: Indigenous knowledge, policies, and planning*. Routledge.
- Skerratt, S. & Steiner, A. (2013) 'Working with communities-of-place: complexities of empowerment', *Local Economy*, 28(3), pp. 320-338.
- Slee, B. Lukesch, R. & Ravazzoli, E. (2022) Social Innovation: The Promise and the Reality in Marginalised Rural Areas in Europe. *World*, 3, pp. 237–259.
- Smith, G. (2010) 'The hollow state: rural governance in China.', *China Quarterly*, 203, pp. 601–618
- Smith, S. N. (2021). Harmonizing the periphery: China's neighborhood strategy under Xi Jinping. *The Pacific Review*, 34(1), pp. 56-84.
- Song, L.F. (2006) 'Zhongguo jingji fazhan moshi de lilun tantao: Fei Xiaotong de yixiang zhongyao xueshu gongxian' [Theoretical discussion on Chinese economic development mode: a major academic contribution of Fei Xiaotong], *Jianghai Xuekan*, (1), pp. 65-71.

- State Council (2001) *The 10<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan of National Economic and Social Development*. Beijing: State Council.
- State Council (2014) *Opinions on Guiding the Orderly Transfer of Rural Land Management Rights to Develop Moderately Scaled Agricultural Operations*. Beijing: State Council.
- State Council (2018a) *The Proposal for Deepening Reform of Party and State institutions*. Beijing: State Council.
- State Council (2018b) *Notification on Launching the Sweeping Black and Evil Force Campaign*. Beijing: State Council.
- State Council (2020) *The Opinion on Adjusting and Improving the Use of Land Transfer Income to Prioritize Supporting Rural Revitalization* [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-09/23/content\\_5546496.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-09/23/content_5546496.htm) (Accessed: 8 July 2023)
- State Council (2021) *Opinions on Regularizing the Campaign Against Black and Evil Force to Consolidate the Achievements of the Campaign*. Beijing: State Council.
- State Council (2022) *Implementation Measures for the Rural Revitalisation Responsibility System* [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-12/14/content\\_5731828.htm](https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-12/14/content_5731828.htm) (Accessed: 7 July 2023)
- Steinhardt, H. C., & Zhao, L. (2014). From “stability overrides everything” to “social governance”: The evolving approach to social order in China. In *China entering the Xi Jinping era* (pp. 193-215). Routledge.
- Sturzaker, J. (2019). Settlement, strategy and planning. In Scott, M., Gallent, N., Gkartzios, M. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Rural Planning*, London: Routledge, pp. 369-77.
- Su F et al., (2012) Local officials’ incentives and China’s economic growth: Tournament thesis reexamined and alternative explanatory framework. *China & World Economy* 20, pp. 1–18.
- Su, M. (2009). *China's Rural Development Policy: Exploring The New Socialist Countryside*. Boulder, CO: First Forum Press.
- Sun, W.T., Ge, W.G., Xie, H.Y. and Shi, Y.Q. (2017) Xiandai Nongye Yuanqu Wenxian Zongshu. [The literature review of modern agricultural zones], *Hezuo Jingji yu Keji*, 12, pp. 23-25.
- Sun, Y. & Zhang, S.W. (2021) ‘Xiangcun jianshe de zhilijizhi ji qi jianshe xiaoying yanjiu: jiyu zhejiang fenghua sige xiangcun jianshe anli de bijiao’ [A Research on Village Governance Mechanism and Construction Performance: Based on Four Village Cases in Fenghua, Zhejiang.], *Chengshiguihua Xuekan*, 2021(1), pp. 44-51.

- Tang et al., (2021) *Zhongguo Hezuo Jingji Fazhan Yanjiu Baogao. [Report on The Development of China's Cooperative Economy]*. Beijing: China Commercial Publishing House.
- Tang, M., Zhao, K. & Liu, Z. (2011) Zhongguo Gudai Xiangcun zhili de jiben moshi ji lishi bianqian [The basic model and historical evolution of rural governance of ancient China], *Jiangnan Luntan*, (3).
- Tawney, R. H. (1932). *Land and Labor in China*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- The World Bank (2018) *Arable Land – China*. [Online]. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.HA.PC?locations=CN> (Accessed: 12 June 2021).
- Thuesen, A.A (2011) 'Partnerships as associations: Input and output legitimacy of LEADER partnerships in Denmark, Finland and Sweden.' *European Planning Studies* 19(4), pp. 575–594.
- Tian, L., Guo, X., & Yin, W. (2017). 'From urban sprawl to land consolidation in suburban Shanghai under the backdrop of increasing versus decreasing balance policy: A perspective of property rights transfer'. *Urban Studies*, 54(4), pp.878-896.
- Tsai, L. L. (2007). Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China. *American Political Science Review*, 101(2), pp. 355-372.
- Tsang, S., & Men, H. (Eds.). (2016). *China in the Xi Jinping era*. Springer.
- Tsui, K.Y, & Wang, Y.Q. (2004). "Between Separate Stoves and a Single Menu: Fiscal Decentralization in China". *China Quarterly*, 177, pp.71–90.
- Tsui, S.I.T. & Wong, T.H. (2013). Rural China: from modernization to reconstruction. *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia*, 49(1).
- Urry, J. (2000) *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*. London: Routledge.
- van der Ploeg, J.D. & van Dijk, G. (1995) *Beyond Modernisation: the impact of endogenous rural development*. Netherlands: Uitgeverij Van Gorcum.
- van Twuijver, M.W., Olmedo, L., O'Shaughnessy, M. and Hennessy, T. (2020). 'Rural social enterprises in Europe: A systematic literature review.', *Local Economy*, 35(2), pp.121-142.
- Vázquez-Barquero, A. & Rodríguez-Cohard, J. C. (2016). 'Endogenous development and institutions: Challenges for local development initiatives'. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 34(6), pp. 1135-1153.\

- Vercher, N., Barlagne, C., Hewitt, R., Nijnik, M., & Esparcia, J. (2021). Whose narrative is it anyway? Narratives of social innovation in rural areas—A comparative analysis of community-led initiatives in Scotland and Spain. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 61(1), pp. 163-189.
- Verdini, G. & Xin, S. (2024) Heritage-led regeneration in Chinese intermediary cities: understanding incremental changes under a ‘business as usual’ urban governance regime. *Town Planning Review*.
- Visser, R. (2010). *Cities Surround the Countryside: Urban Aesthetics in Postsocialist China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Walder, A. (1988) *Communist Neo-traditionalism: work and authority in Chinese industry*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Wan, X. (2015). ‘Governmentalities in everyday practices: The dynamic of urban neighbourhood governance in China.’ *Urban Studies*.
- Wang, C. M., Maye, D., & Woods, M. (2023). Planetary rural geographies. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 20438206231191731.
- Wang, G. (2014) *Tamed Village “Democracy”: Elections, governance and clientelism in a contemporary Chinese Village*. Berlin: Springer.
- Wang, H. (2014). *China from empire to nation-state*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, J. (2015). Managing social stability: The perspective of a local government in China. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 15(1), pp. 1-25.
- Wang, J. (2017). Representing Chinese nationalism/patriotism through president Xi Jinping’s “Chinese dream” discourse. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(6), pp. 830-848.
- Wang, J. (2018) ‘Nongcun shehuixue yanjiu ligyu de gongminshehui sichao xingsi: jiyu lilun, lishi yu xianshi sange weidu de fenxi [Review of civil society theories in rural sociology, an analysis based on theory, history and reality]’, *Zhongguo Nongcun Guan*, (6), pp.128-141.
- Wang, J., & Mou, Y. (2021). ‘The Paradigm Shift in the Disciplining of Village Cadres in China: From Mao to Xi.’ *The China Quarterly*, 248(S1), pp. 181-199.
- Wang, L. and Wang, S. (2012) ‘Xiandai Nongye Chanye Yuanqu Yunxing Moshi yu Jixiaoguanxi de Fenxi’ [Research on the relationships between operation mode and performance in Modern Agricultural Industrial Park], *Kexue Guanli Yanjiu*, 30(1), pp. 117-120.

- Wang, M.M. (2001) *Shequ de Licheng: Xicun Hanren jiazhu de ge'an yanjiu [The Process of Communities: a study on Han family of Xicun village]*. Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House.
- Wang, Q. & Zhang, X. (2017). 'Three rights separation: China's proposed rural land rights reform and four types of local trials.' *Land Use Policy*, 63, pp.111-121.
- Wang, W. et al., (2020) 'Xiandai Nongye changye yuan jianshe moshi yu guanjian jishu yanjiu' [Study on the construction mode and key techniques of Modern Agricultural Zone], *Zhongguo Nongjihuaxue Bao*, 41(12), pp. 210-216.
- Wang, X. et al., (2015). 'Giving in China: An emerging nonprofit sector embedded within a strong state.', In Wiepking, P. and Handy, F. (eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of global philanthropy*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 354-368.
- Wang, Y., Nomura, R., & Mori, S. (2015). Comparative Analysis on Master Plan of Village Reconstruction and Its Performance A case study of Shangzhuang New Village by the new rural policies in China. *Urban and Regional Planning Review*, 2, 31-42.
- Ward N, et al., (2005) *Universities, the knowledge economy and neo-endogenous rural development*. CRE Discussion Paper.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. University of California Press.
- Wei, G. (2004) *Guanzhi yu Zizhi: 20 shiji shangbanqi de Zhongguo xianzhi [Bureaucy and autonomy: Chinese county institution in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century]*. Beijing: The Commerical Press.
- Weiner, M. (1965). 'Political Integration and Political Development.', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 358(1), pp. 52-64.
- Wen, T.J. (1999) Bange shiji de nongcun zhidu bianqian [The institutional transition of rural China within half a century], *Zhanlue yu Guanli*.
- Wen, T.J. (2009) *Sannong Wenti yu Zhidu Bianqian [Rural Issues and Institutional Evolution]*. Beijing: China Economic Publishing House.
- Wen, T.J. (2010) *Zhongguo Xinnongcun Jianshe Baogao [The Report on China's New Countryside Construction]*. Fuzhou: Fujian People's Publishing House.
- Wen, T.J. (2012) *Jiedu Sunan [Demystify The Southern Jiangsu Model]*. Soochow University Press.
- Wen, T.J. (2021) *Ten Crises: The Political Economy of China's Development (1949-2020)*. Springer Nature.



- Woods, M. (2009) 'Rural geography: blurring boundaries and making connections', *Progress in Human Geography*, 33(6), pp. 849-858.
- Woods, M. (2011) *Rural*. London: Routledge.
- Woolcock, M. (2001). 'The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes.' *Canadian journal of policy research*, 2(1), pp. 11-17.
- Wu, B. & Liu, L.H. (2020). 'Social capital for rural revitalization in China: A critical evaluation on the government's new countryside programme in Chengdu.' *Land Use Policy*, 91.
- Wu, F. (2010). 'Gated and Packaged Suburbia: Packaging and branding Chinese suburban residential development', *Cities*, 27, pp. 385–96.
- Wu, F. (2016). China's emergent city-region governance: a new form of state spatial selectivity through state-orchestrated rescaling. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(6), pp. 1134-1151.
- Wu, F. (2018) 'Planning centrality, market instruments: Governing Chinese urban transformation under state entrepreneurialism', *Urban Studies*, 55(7), pp. 1383-1399.
- Wu, F. (2022). Land financialisation and the financing of urban development in China. *Land Use Policy*, 112, 104412.
- Wu, F. (2023). The long shadow of the state: financializing the Chinese city. *Urban Geography*, 44(1), pp. 37-58.
- Wu, F. (2023). Theorising urban development in China: 'State entrepreneurialism' from the ground up. *Dialogues in Human Geography*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206231154346>
- Wu, F., Zhang, F., & Liu, Y. (2022). Beyond growth machine politics: Understanding state politics and national political mandates in China's urban redevelopment. *Antipode*, 54(2), 608-628.
- Wu, W., Zhang, M., Qing, Y., & Li, Y. (2019). 'Village resettlement and social relations in transition: the case of Suzhou, China.' *International Development Planning Review*, 41(3).
- Xi, J. (2020) 'We must persist in prioritizing the resolution of issues related to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers as the top priority of the entire party's work. We need to mobilize the efforts of the entire party and society to promote rural revitalization', *Qiu Shi*, 5, pp. 1-8 [Online]. Available from: [http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-03/31/c\\_1128515304.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-03/31/c_1128515304.htm) (Accessed: 11 July 2023).

- Xi, J. (2023) Speech at the symposium on cultural inheritance and development, (9), *Qiu Zhi*, pp.4-7.
- Xiao, L. (2020) 'Xiangmujincun zhong cunganbu jueise ji cunzhuang zhili xingtai' [The Role of Village Cadres and Governance Pattern in Projects Entering Villages], *Xibei Nonglinkeji Daxue Xuebao*, 20(1), pp. 71-80.
- Xin, S., Guo, Q. & Zhong, S. (2022) Rural Revitalisation Strategy for Suzhou: Towards Social Innovation-driven Neo-endogenous Development'. In Xu, Y. & Kim, J.S. (eds.) *Future Suzhou*. Beijing: China Building and Construction Press, pp. 136-145.
- Xinhua News (2022) Analyze and study the current economic situation and economic work; review the 'Comprehensive Report on the Situation of the Ninth Round of Inspections by the 19th Central Committee' [Online] Available from: <http://jhsjk.people.cn/article/32488828?isindex=1> (Accessed: 17 January 2024)
- Xinhuanet (2010) *Interpretation of the No.1 Circular of the CPC Central Committee: "Mechanization of Agricultural, Rural, and Farmers' Investment Enters a New Era"* [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-02/01/content\\_1525434.htm](https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-02/01/content_1525434.htm) (Accessed: 8 July 2023)
- Xinhuanet (2012) *In 2012, central government expenditure on "San Nong" (agriculture, rural areas, and farmers) reached 1,228.66 billion yuan, marking a 17.9% increase compared to the previous year.* [Online]. Available from: [https://www.gov.cn/2012lhft/2/content\\_2086635.htm](https://www.gov.cn/2012lhft/2/content_2086635.htm) (Accessed: 8 July 2023)
- Xinhuanet (2017) "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", *19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC*, 18 October 2017, Beijing, China [Online]. Available from: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c\\_1121867529.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/19cpcnc/2017-10/27/c_1121867529.htm) (Accessed: 6 July 2023)
- Xiong, W. (2019) Chengxiang shehui: li jie chengxiang guanxi de xingainian [Urban-rural society: understanding the new concept of Chinese urban-rural relations], *Wenhua zongheng*, (2), pp. 46-53.
- Xu, C.G. (2011) 'The Fundamental Institutions of China's Reforms and Development', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 49(4), pp. 1076-1151.
- Xu, L., Rong, Y. & Wang, S. (2020) 'Xiandai Nongye Chanyeyuan yu Nongye Kejiyuan de Guihua Yaodian Bijiao Yanjiu' [Comparative studies on Modern Agricultural Zones and Agricultural Technology Zones in key planning elements], *Nongye yu Jishu*, 40(3), pp. 164-167.
- Xu, Y. (2019) *Guojiahua, Nongminxing yu Xiangcunzhenghe [Nationalisation, Peasantry and Rural Integration]*. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House.

- Yan H. & Chen Y. (2013) 'Debating the rural cooperative movement in China, the past and the present', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40(6), PP.955-981
- Yang, C.K. & Zhu, J.J. (2018) 'Xiangcun Zhenxing Zhanlue xia de Zhongxiao Chengshi he Xiaochengzhen Fazhan Kunjing yu Lujing Yanjiu' [Development Difficulties and Paths of Towns and Small and Medium-sized Cities under the Rural Revitalization Strategy], *Chengshifazhan Yanjiu*, 25(11), pp. 1-7.
- Yang, S.H. (2017) 'Xiangmuzhi yunzuo fangshi xia zhongxibu nongcun shehuizhili de mataixiaoying' [The Matthew effect of rural social governance in the mid-western China under the program-led governance], *Xueshu Luntan*, 40(1), pp. 30-34.
- Yang, Z. et al., (2016) 'Peri-urban agricultural development in Beijing: Varied forms, innovative practices and policy implications', *Habitat International*, 56, pp. 222-234
- Yao, Y. (2017). Elite competition, factionalism and strongman governance in a central China village. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26(108), 901-914.
- Ye, Y., Qi, B. & Yu, L. (2018) 'Jiyu tudi guanzhi shijiao de zhongguo xiangcun neishengxing fazhan falu wenti fenxi: yi yingguo weijian' [The endogenous Development in Rural China from the Perspective of Land Management: lessons from the UK], *Zhongguo Nongcunjingji*, (3), pp. 123-137.
- Yi, X.T. (2020) 'Cun dangzuzhi shuji yijiantiao de shengchengluoji, neihanjiexi he shishizhixiang' [The "one shoulder, multiple roles" reform of village party secretary: logic, nature and implementation], *Tansuo*, 4, pp. 111-120.
- Yong, X. (2022). *Nationalisation, Peasantry and Rural Integration in China*. Taylor & Francis.
- Young, N. (2016). 'Responding to rural change: Adaptation, resilience and community action', In Shucksmith and Brown (eds.) *The International Handbook of Rural Studies*, New York: Routledge, pp.638-649.
- Yu, W., Lu, X., & Wang, E. (2020). 'Rural land reforms and villagers' preferences for urban settlement: A case study of Shandong Province', China. *Growth and Change*, 51(3), pp. 1259-1276.
- Yuan, S. (2012) *Furenzhixun: zhezong Wuzhen de quanli Shijian (1996-2011)* [The rich govern rural China: the practice of power in Wuzhen Town in the middle of Zhejiang Province (1996-2011)], Thesis (PhD). Wuhan: Huazhong University of Science & Technology.
- Yuen, S. (2014). 'Disciplining the party. xi jinping's anti-corruption campaign and its limits', *China Perspectives*, 2014(2014/3), pp. 41-47.

- Zajda K (2014) 'Problems of functioning of polish local action groups from the perspective of the social capital concept.' *East European Countryside* 20(1), pp. 73–97.
- Zhang, F., & Wu, F. (2022). Performing the ecological fix under state entrepreneurialism: A case study of Taihu New Town, China. *Urban Studies*, 59(5), 1068-1084.
- Zhang, F., Wu, F., & Wang, W. (2023). City-regional governance under state entrepreneurialism in China. *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research*, 2(1), 3-15.
- Zhang, J. & Wu, F. (2006) "China's changing economic governance: Administrative annexation and the reorganization of local governments in the Yangtze River Delta". *Regional Studies* 40 (1): 3-21.
- Zhang, J. (2021). Analysis of the Reasons for the Absence of Slums in China and the Phenomenon of Quasi Slums—Based on the Comparison with India. *Open Access Library Journal*, 8(9), 1-12.
- Zhang, L., & Hu, Z. (2017). Empire, Tianxia and great unity: A historical examination and future vision of China's international communication. *Global Media and China*, 2(2), 197-207.
- Zhang, Q. F., & Donaldson, J. A. (2008). The rise of agrarian capitalism with Chinese characteristics: Agricultural modernization, agribusiness and collective land rights. *The China Journal*, (60), pp. 25-47.
- Zhang, S. (2014). Land-centered urban politics in transitional China—Can they be explained by Growth Machine Theory?. *Cities*, 41, pp. 179-186.
- Zhang, W. & Zhang, Z. (2018) 'Ziyuan, canyu, renting: xiangcunzhenxing de neishengfazhan luoji' [Resources, participation and recognition: the endogenous logic and path choice of rural revitalisation] *Shehuikexue*, (11), pp. 75-85.
- Zhang, Y. (2018). 'Who Will Till the Land and How Will They Till It?'. In Zhang, Y. (eds). *Insights into Chinese Agriculture*. Singapore: Springer, pp. 117-147.
- Zhao, D. (2015). *The Confucian-Legalist State: A New Theory of Chinese History: A New Theory of Chinese History*. Oxford University Press.
- Zhao, Qianyu., & Zhang, ZZhanlu. (2017). Does China's 'increasing versus decreasing balance' land-restructuring policy restructure rural life? Evidence from Dongfan Village, Shaanxi Province. *Land Use Policy*, 68, pp. 649-659.
- Zhao, Y.J. & Webster, C. (2011). Land dispossession and enrichment in China's suburban villages. *Urban Studies*, 48(3), pp. 529-551.
- Zhao, Y.J. (2014) 'Land-centred Finance: History, Logic and Choices', *Chengshi Fazhan Yanjiu*, 21(1), pp. 1-13.

- Zhe, X.Y. & Chen, Y.Y. (2011) [The mechanism and governance logic of the hierarchical operation of the project system: a sociological case study of “projects entering the village”], *Zhongguo Shehuikexue*, (4), pp. 126-148.
- Zhe, X.Y. (2014) ‘Xianyu Zhengfu Zhili Moshi de Xinbianhua’ [New Changes in the Governance Model of County-level Governments.], *Zhongguo Shehuikexue*, (1), pp. 121-139.
- Zhen, Y. & He, Y. (2018). ‘An Empirical Analysis of the Factors Affecting the Profitability of China’s Agricultural Listed Companies under the Background of Agricultural Modernization’, *International Journal of Applied Economics, Finance and Accounting*, 2(1), pp. 12-19.
- Zhong, S. (2011). Towards China's urban-rural integration: issues and options. *International Journal of China Studies*, 2(2), 345.
- Zhong, S. and Xin, S. (2021) ‘Urban-rural relations in the context of New Urbanisation: the case of Suzhou.’, In Tang, B. and Cheung, P. (eds.) *Suzhou in Transition*. New York: Routledge.
- Zhou, F.Z. (2012) ‘Caizheng zijin de zhuanxianghua jiqi wenti jianlun “xiangmuzhiguo”’ [The Problems of Fiscal Earmarked Funds: On “Governing the State through Program”], *Shehui*, 32(1), pp. 1-37
- Zhou, L. A. (2019). Understanding china: a dialogue with philip huang. *Modern China*, 45(4), pp. 392-432.
- Zhou, L.A (2004) The incentive and cooperation of government officials in the political tournaments: An interpretation of the prolonged local protectionism and duplicative investments in China. *Economic Research Journal* 6, pp. 33–40.
- Zhou, L.A (2007) Governing China’s local officials: An analysis of promotion tournament model. *Economic Research Journal* 7, pp. 36–50.
- Zhou, L.A (2016). The administrative subcontract: Significance, relevance and implications for intergovernmental relations in China. *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2(1), 34-74.
- Zhou, L.A., Liu, C., Li, X. & Weng, X. (2015) “Cengceng jia ma’ yu guanyuan jili” [Amplification of targets and incentives for officials]. *Shijie Jingji Wenhui*, (1), pp. 1-15.
- Zhou, P. (2020) Zhonghua Xiandaiguo jia goujian zhong de renkou guominhua [The citizenisation within the construction of Chinese modern State], *Jiangnan Luntan*, 12.
- Zhou, X. (2022) *The Logic of Governance in China. An Organizational Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

- Zhou, X., & Lian, H. (2020). 'Modes of governance in the Chinese bureaucracy: A "control rights" theory.', *The China Journal*, 84(1), pp. 51-75.
- Zhou, X., Lian, H., Ortolano, L., & Ye, Y. (2013). A behavioral model of "muddling through" in the Chinese bureaucracy: The case of environmental protection. *The China Journal*, (70), pp. 120-147.
- Zhou, Y., Guo, L., & Liu, Y. (2019). Land consolidation boosting poverty alleviation in China: Theory and practice. *Land use policy*, 82, pp. 339-348.
- Zhou, Y., Lin, G. C., & Zhang, J. (2019). Urban China through the lens of neoliberalism: Is a conceptual twist enough? *Urban Studies*, 56(1), pp. 33-43.
- Zhu, J. (2018). 'Transition of villages during urbanization as collective communities: A case study of Kunshan, China.', *Cities*, 72, pp.320-328.
- Zhu, Y. (2011). "Performance legitimacy" and China's political adaptation strategy. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 16, pp. 123-140.
- Zweig, D. (2016). *Freeing China's Farmers: Rural Restructuring in the Reform Era: Rural Restructuring in the Reform Era*. Routledge.

## Appendix A: List of key political reform and campaigns of CPC China

Timeline	Name of political reform and campaigns	Content
1953-1978	Rural Collectivisation Movement (农村集体化运动)	Led by Mao Zedong, this political campaign aimed to transform individual smallholder agriculture into collective, state-controlled cooperatives such as People's Communes. This movement was part of the broader strategy to rapidly industrialise the country and increase agricultural productivity. However, it led to significant social upheaval and is often associated with the Great Famine in China.
1958-1961	Great Leap Forward (大跃进)	Led by Mao Zedong, this political campaign aimed to transform China from an agrarian society into a socialist one through rapid industrialisation and collectivisation. This involved merging collective farms into larger People's Communes with the hope of achieving economies of scale. However, the campaign resulted in catastrophic failure, including a widespread famine.
1966-1976	Proletarian Cultural Revolution (无产阶级文化大革命)	Led by Mao Zedong, this political campaign sought to reassert his authority, maintain the revolutionary fervour within the CPC, and purge capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society. The Cultural Revolution concluded with Mao's death in 1976 which ushered in a period of Open Reform under Deng Xiaoping.
1980s-present	Open Reform (改革开放)	Led by Deng Xiaoping, this reform was initiated in 1978 and gained momentum throughout the 1980s. This transformative agenda sought to modernise China's economy and open it to global markets.
1980s-1990s	Rural Industrialisation Movement (农村工业化运动)	Characterised by the proliferation of Town- and Village-owned Enterprises (TVEs), this was a significant economic reform process in China which began in the late 1970s. It involved the transformation and diversification of rural economies by establishing and promoting locally owned industrial enterprises in towns and villages. This shift sought to stimulate economic growth, create employment opportunities, and reduce poverty in rural areas. TVEs played a crucial role in China's transition from a primarily agrarian economy to a more industrial and mixed one and, through so doing, contributed significantly to the country's rapid economic development.
1994	Tax-sharing Fiscal Reform (分税制改革)	The Tax-sharing Fiscal Reform that occurred in China - particularly in the context of TVEs - was a significant economic reform initiative that was implemented in the 1990s. It created a more centralised fiscal relationship between central and local governments, and introduced a system in which tax revenues were divided between levels of government according to set proportions. For TVEs, this reform meant that there was a shift from a system in which they primarily contributed to local government revenue, to one where their tax contributions were shared between central and local governments. This

		significantly curtailed the willingness and capability of local governments to support the development of TVEs.
<b>2005-2006</b>	Agricultural Tax Reform (农业税改革)	Initiated by Hu Jintao, this reform sought to alleviate the financial burdens of rural farmers and was a key step in addressing rural-urban income disparity. The elimination of these taxes was part of a broader effort to modernise China's agricultural sector and improve rural livelihoods. However, the reform further weakened the fiscal capacity of towns and villages, and led to some power vacuums at the grassroots level of party-state governance in rural areas.
<b>2005-2012</b>	New Countryside Construction Campaign (社会主义新农村建设)	Initiated by Hu Jintao, this was a national initiative which aimed to modernise and revitalise rural areas. Its objectives included improving agricultural productivity, enhancing living standards, promoting sustainable development, and reducing the urban-rural divide. The campaign focused on infrastructure development, basic public services enhancement, and environmental protection in rural regions.
<b>2014</b>	Rural Lands Right Separation Reform (农村土地三权分置改革)	<p>Initiated by Xi Jinping, these reforms separate ambiguous and non-transferable rural collective property rights into land ownership, contract rights, and management rights. Within this system, ownership still belongs to the rural collective (村集体). As a result, the land is collectively owned by a village or a group of villagers, rather than by individual farmers or the state. The collective ownership is permanent and non-transferable.</p> <p>In addition, contract rights belong to rural households. Under the Household Responsibility System, families contract land from the collective for long-term use; usually agricultural. These contract rights are inheritable and can be sub-contracted or leased to others, enabling greater flexibility in land use.</p> <p>Management rights pertain to the right to use land for agricultural production and other activities. Rural households can transfer, lease, or mortgage these management rights, allowing them to engage in diversified agricultural activities or even move to urban areas for employment while leasing out their land management rights to local or extra-local actors for income.</p>
<b>2017</b>	National Rural Revitalisation Strategy (国家乡村振兴战略)	Initiated by Xi Jinping, this is a comprehensive policy framework which aims to modernise and revitalise rural China. Launched in 2017, it focuses on improving quality of life in rural regions by addressing issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, and the advancement of public services, while promoting sustainable agriculture, ecological conservation, and balanced urban-rural development. The strategy is a key component of China's goal to build a 'moderately prosperous society' and rectify the existent unequal urban-rural governance and welfare distribution structure.
<b>2018</b>	National Party and State Authority Reform (党和国家机构改革)	Initiated by Xi Jinping, this reform refers to a major restructuring of the CPC and state agencies. Announced during the National People's Congress of March 2018, this reform was one of the most significant organisational adjustments that has occurred since the reform era began in China in the late 1970s. The reform emphasises the central role of the CPC in all aspects of governance and societal management, and reinforces Xi Jinping's leadership as well as the



		CPC's control over state affairs. It involved merging or restructuring various government ministries and agencies to improve efficiency and strengthen the CPC's control over policy areas, including anti-corruption, military service, the economy, environment, agriculture, and culture.
<b>2018</b>	Spatial Planning Reform (国土空间规划改革)	Initiated by Xi Jinping, this reform represents a significant policy shift in China's approach to land-use management and spatial planning. This reform aims to integrate and streamline the previously fragmented and multi-tiered system of land and spatial planning. Prior to this reform, China's land use and spatial planning were managed through separate systems, including urban planning, rural planning, land use planning, and ecological/environmental conservation planning; each with its own set of regulations and administrative bodies. The reform aims to strengthen central government oversight in spatial planning, particularly with regard to the conservation of farmland, and to ensure that national priorities and policies are consistently applied across different regions.
<b>2018</b>	"One Shoulder Pole" Reform of Village Cadre (村干部"一肩挑"改革)	<p>Initiated by Xi Jinping, this reform pertains to the consolidation of two key roles in village governance: the village party secretary, and the village committee director. It seeks to ensure that the party secretary also acts as the village director. The village party secretary is typically the primary local representative of the CPC, and holds significant influence in terms of policy implementation and political guidance at the village level. The village committee director, on the other hand, is an elected position, and is responsible for the overall administration and community welfare activities in the (given) village.</p> <p>By combining these roles, the reform aims to reduce bureaucratic overlap, improve coordination of village affairs, streamline efficiency, enhance the party leadership within rural governance, and strengthen the implementation of policies and directives from higher levels of government.</p>
<b>2019</b>	First Secretary Institution (第一书记制度)	Introduced by Xi Jinping, this institution involves appointing party cadres as First Secretaries in villages, especially in rural and impoverished areas. These officials are typically dispatched from higher levels of government or party organisations in different sectors, and are tasked with coordinating resources, developing local economies, and leading and implementing poverty alleviation and rural revitalisation programmes at the local level.

## Appendix B: Additional context information of Chinese government and governance for international audience

Chinese administrative rank system for officials:

- **National Level (国家级):** These are the highest-ranking officials and include positions such as the President, Premier, and members of the State Council. For example, Xi Jinping serves as the President of China.
- **Province/Ministry Level (省部级):** These are the officials who head ministries or equivalent authorities of central government or are in charge of provincial-level governments. For instance, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs is a typical province/ministry-level official.
- **Department/Bureau Level (厅局级):** These are officials who manage departments or bureaus either at central or provincial level. They are responsible for the operational aspects of governance in a particular sector. For instance, the director of the Provincial Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department is a department/bureau-level official. However, they can also be the leaders of prefecture governments, such as a prefecture mayor.
- **County/Division Level (县处级):** These officials are typically responsible for governing counties or equivalent administrative divisions. They could serve as a county mayor, a director of a prefecture department, or a similar role.
- **Township/Section Level (乡科级):** These are lower-ranking officials, who are commonly responsible for township or village administration, or serve in sections or divisions within higher-level administrative bodies. For example, a town or township mayor or a section chief within a county-level authority is a township/section level official.

Chinese central and local governments (excluding autonomous regions and special administrative regions):

- **Central Government (中央政府):** This is the national-level government, headquartered in Beijing, and responsible for the entire country's governance. It consists of central-level authorities such as the Central Party Committee of the CPC, the National People's Congress, and the State Council. The Central Government has the ultimate decision-making power on major national policies, international relations, and legislative matters.
- **Provincial Government (省级政府):** Below the Central Government, China is divided into 34 provincial-level administrative regions, including 23 provinces, 4 municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing), 5 autonomous regions, and 2 Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong, and Macau). Provincial

governments handle regional issues such as economic development, healthcare, and education.

- **Prefectural Government (地级政府):** These are intermediary governments that manage several counties. They coordinate policies from provincial governments to county governments and usually manage a variety of regional services.
- **County Government (县级政府):** Counties and county-level cities form the core of China's third level of sub-national administrative division. They handle local affairs and governance issues, including local law enforcement, education, and healthcare. A county government is generally smaller and has fewer powers than provincial or prefectural governments, but plays a vital role in grassroots governance.
- **Town/Township Governments (乡镇政府):** These are the lowest level of government and are closest to citizens and communities. They manage the most localised issues such as agricultural advisories, basic healthcare, and local road maintenance.

## **Appendix C: Interview Questions**

**Content unavailable due to the need to protect personal information and ensure data privacy in accordance with ethical research practices**