

**The emergence of a new mode of rural governance
driven by rural programs: a case study from Nanjing,
China**

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Paper for

The Urban China Research Network

Conference at Brown University

May 8-9, 2015

UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT * DO NOT CIRCULATE OR CITE

Updated April 2015

Abstract

Rural governance studies often focus on the non-governmental aspects of the governance system. Very few studies examine the traditional structures among governments themselves. However, the rise of rural programs in China has provided an excellent opportunity to examine the rural governance from the perspective of government. Based on the empirical study of Nanjing, this paper argues that a new mode of rural governance driven by programs is in the making. It employs the measures of legitimation and mobilization while rural planning acts as a technical measure between the bilateral interactions. Through those rural programs, the multi-level state power in the rural governance has been enhanced unprecedentedly. It is found that the central/provincial governments generally initiate and lead the programs, the local governments handle the programs in a flexible way, while the grassroots governments have no visible autonomy in the program-driven rural governance. In conclusion, the new mode of rural governance involves intensive intergovernmental interactions that characterized negotiated exchanges and complementary interactions—a mode of multi-level rural governance.

Keywords

Rural Governance, Rural Program, Rural Planning, Intergovernmental Relation, China

Introduction

As a broad theory that has impacts on many disciplines in social science, governance theory has also penetrated into rural studies. In the last decade, we have witnessed a significant volume of work on rural governance. To achieve greater efficiency and accountability in governance, it is often assumed that state intervention should be reduced to the minimum to ensure enough room for citizen involvement (Rhodes, 1996). Accordingly, rural governance studies tend to concentrate on the non-governmental aspects of the governance system. There are very few studies on the traditional structures among governments themselves (Pemberton & Goodwin, 2010). Works in the field are generally focused on the basic issues and concepts of rural governance (Connelly et al., 2006; Goodwin, 1998; Little, 2001; Ward & McNicholas, 1998), the differentiation of rural space and governance (Marsden, 1998), the formation and operation of partnership in the countryside (Edwards et al., 2001; Jones & Little, 2000; Radin et al., 1996), rural community engagement and participation (Marsden & Murdoch, 1998; Swindal & McAreavey, 2012; Tewdwr-Jones, 1998) and so on.

However, the state remains heavily present in many spheres of governance (Pierre & Peters, 2000). It is especially so for the governments in China who has hierarchical levels and a strong role in the governance system (Shen, 2007). Although the studies on the rural governance in China have experienced significant paradigm shifts, the role of government has never been ignored in scholars' arguments. It has evolved from state brokerage model based on the 'culture nexus of power' (Duara, 1988) or peasant-state clientelism (Oi, 1985, 1989) in the neo-traditionalism period (Walder, 1988), to the local-state corporatism (Lin, 1995; Oi, 1992; Unger & Chan, 1995) in the rural China took off period (Oi, 1999).

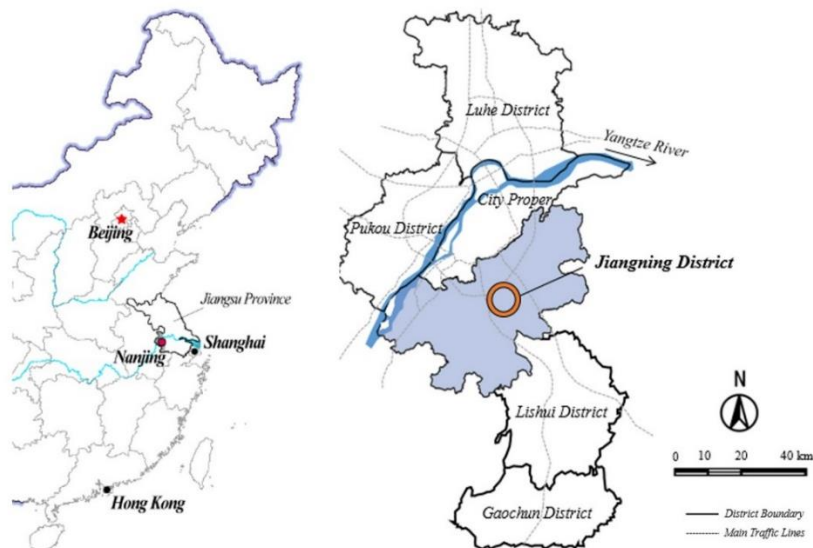
The emergence of rural programs can be regarded as a new form of state intervention in contemporary rural China. They provide us with an excellent opportunity to examine the rural governance from the perspective of governments. As a result of fiscal reform since the turn of new millennium, government-initiated programs permeate in the socioeconomic operations of China (Qu, 2012). Some scholars keenly termed this new paradigm as 'governing through programs' (Zhou, 2012: 34-36). However, despite some seminal and conceptual arguments (Qu, 2012; Zhou, 2012), there are few empirical studies on the changes in rural governance driven by those programs. Furthermore, it remains unclear how the programs initiated by governments shape the countryside and, to what extent the new mode of rural governance in China can contribute to the governance theory.

This paper attempts to focus on the government side in the rural governance. Based on our first-hand fieldwork in Nanjing, it aims to explore the new mode of rural governance driven by rural programs, and to illustrate the characteristics of the new mode of rural governance. After a short introduction to the study area and research method in the next section, the following sections will review the background of the emergence of program-driven governance and present the empirical evidences in Nanjing. The final section concludes the paper.

Study Area and Research Method

Nanjing is the capital city of Jiangsu Province in Eastern China (see Figure 1). It lies about 300 km upstream of Shanghai along the Yangtze River, with a population of 8.16 million in 2012 and a territory of 6587 km² (NMBS, 2013). Regarding the administrative level, Nanjing is a sub-provincial level city. It has more direct connections with the central government than nearby prefecture-level cities such as Suzhou, Wuxi and Changzhou. Nanjing is characteristic of the so-called ‘big city with vast rural area’. In 2012, the number of rural residents was 2.03 million and accounted for 24.9% of the de jure population. Although the share of rural residents is the lowest in Jiangsu, the imbalance between urban and rural development is significant. From 2009 to 2012, the income ratio between urban and rural residents fluctuated between 2.5 to 2.3 while the same indices of Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou region are around 1.95 in the same period.

Figure 1 Location of Nanjing and Jiangning



We choose Jiangning as our focused field site. Jiangning is a district under the jurisdiction of Nanjing and is located to the southeast of Nanjing city proper. As an independent suburban county before 2000, Jiangning retains most of its former administrative rights after the administrative annexation as a district. Different from the original districts in the city proper, Nanjing municipal government cannot achieve a unified management of Jiangning (Zhang & Wu, 2006). Hence in this paper, both of them are regarded as local governments. For the sake of coherence of rural policies and simplicity, the state council, CPC central committee and Jiangsu provincial government are combined as central/provincial level governments. The remaining sub-district/town governments and even village committees in Jiangning are primarily in charge of program implementation. They are categorized as grassroots governments in our analysis.

Our fieldwork was conducted in the summer of 2014, comprising many visits to the typical villages and official departments in Nanjing. To get familiar with the local context and informants, participant observation was the initial step in the field. It helped us to formulate sensible questions

in an appropriate language for the next stage of research. Apart from official documents and statistics, the main data of this paper are derived from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted in the second stage. We interviewed five officials at different government levels of Jiangsu, Nanjing and Jiangning, asking questions on their general knowledge and opinion of the governance changes driven by programs. For a comprehensive understanding, village cadres, peasants, planners and entrepreneurs were also covered in our interviews.

The Emergence of a New Mode of Rural Governance

Rural governance crisis and ‘rural issues matter’

In contemporary China, there exist two seemingly contradictory phenomena: the crisis of rural governance and consensus of ‘rural issues matter’. Against such background, a new of rural governance driven by rural programs has emerged.

The crisis of governance happens in the grassroots society of countryside. At the turn of the new century, the social confrontation between the state and peasants climbed to a peak (Li, 2002). To cope with the problem, the leadership steered by Hu and Wen launched the tax-for-fee reform and successfully abolished the agriculture tax. However, new governance challenge appeared in the post-agriculture-tax period. At the level of township, scholars found that the decline in local revenue resulted in significant reduction in the government autonomy, which is in form of deficit in local services provision (Kennedy, 2007; Yep, 2004). In Anhui, the township government was squeezed from the above—by the imperatives of county government, as well as from the below—by village pressure of policy enforcement. Thus ‘hollowing out’ situation occurred in the township government (Smith, 2010). A recent research on the village committee indicated that, the original tight engagement between cadres and villagers had alienated in the post-agriculture-tax period (Chen, 2014).

On the other hand, the rural issues have always been on the top agenda of central leaders. From 2004 to 2015, for consecutive 12 years, the annual No.1 document of Communist Party of China (hereafter CPC) have focused on ‘San Nong Wen Ti’¹. China is an ancient agrarian country with a huge rural base, in terms of population or area. It is not hard to understand the central’s concerns on the countryside: setting self-sufficiency of grains as a top priority (Cloke & Goodwin, 1992), maintaining social stability at the grassroots society of countryside. Since PRC’s establishment in 1949, the dual system that divided urban and rural sectors² has been a long-standing obstacle that hinders rural development, deliberately or inevitably. The countryside has been essentially sacrificed to support the development of industries and cities in China. After decades of rampant growth of the latter, the urban-rural imbalance has deteriorated rather than improved (Long et al., 2011). The central government of China gradually recognized the challenge. In 2003, the milestone program of ‘Urban-rural Coordinated Development’ (hereafter URCD) was launched by 16th Central Committee of CPC. It was proposed based on the judgment of ‘two trends’ situation, i.e., supporting agriculture by bonus of industries and supporting countryside by bonus of cities (Han, 2005). This strategic program of subsidizing the countryside kicked off a new era of

¹ Literally three rural issues, i.e., agriculture, peasant and countryside

² For example, hukou system, land tenure system, medical insurance system, etc.

paternalism on rural issues.

The rise of rural programs

The financial redistribution between multi-level governments facilitated the rise of rural programs. Under the tax-sharing scheme since 1994, taxes were divided into three distinct categories: central, local and shared (Wang, 1997). In contrast to the previous system, the financial capacity of central government is strengthened unprecedentedly. In response to the bottom-up extraction mechanism, a top-down redistribution system from central to local emerged later. Using transfer payment, like business contract, central government can narrow regional disparities and spread developmental outlook efficiently. The aforementioned can be regarded as driving force for the rise of so-called ‘program system’.

With bulging wallet of upper-level government but shrinking pocket of the grassroots, there is no doubt that the countryside has been targeted as the main state investment reservoir (see Table 1). According to official report, 1379.9 billion RMB went to rural areas in 2013 (MFC, 2013), and at least 100 national rural programs had been introduced by the central government (Zuo, 2014). Those rural programs in China are significantly different those in the US or UK context. Nearly all of them are initiated and implemented by the governmental sectors, either vertical government departments or horizontal regional-levels. In contrast, the programs from the relevant departments of UK or US governments are initiated with an emphasis on participation in the rural economic and community development, and they can also be applied by and allocated to non-governmental organizations such as local enterprises or community cooperatives in forms of grants (Radin et al., 1996; Swindal & McAreavey, 2012; Ward & McNicholas, 1998).

Specific projects in the program

A rural program consists of relevant specific projects. Involving activity or engineering on the rural ground, a project refers to concrete or specific operation of a program. For example, the ‘Village Officers from College Students’ program (see Table 1) literally indicates its subordinated projects. With attached funding, specific projects in this talent program formulated detailed incentives and schedule to improve the talent structure among village cadres. However, it is hard to identify concrete projects for some programs which are comprehensive in nature. Involving slogan or rough guideline for local practices, those programs can be interpreted as strategic stimulus from the central government. As Ahlers and Schubert commented on the program of ‘New Socialist Countryside Construction’ (hereafter NSCC), it is ‘*an intentionally vague but holistic policy framework initiated by the central government to be adapted to local conditions*’ (Ahlers & Schubert, 2009: 57). Even in a comprehensive program, it is only through the implementation and consolidation of specific projects that the strategy of the state can be projected upon the rural ground.

Table 1 Representative rural programs at the central/provincial level

Theme	Field	Territory	Source	Initiation Time
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Urban-rural Coordinated Development	Comprehensive	National	The 3rd plenary session of 16th central committee of CPC, Central Committee of CPC	October, 2003
New Socialist Countryside Construction	Comprehensive	National	The 5rd plenary session of 16th central committee of CPC, Central Committee of CPC	October, 2005
Village Officers from College Students	Human Resources	National	<i>Opinions in guiding and encouraging college graduates to the grassroots</i> , Central Committee of CPC, State Council	June, 2005
Abolition of Agricultural Tax	Finance	National	<i>Regulations on abolition of agricultural tax</i> , State Council	January, 2006
Hectares of Farmland	Land	Provincial	<i>Initiative of hectares of farmland project</i> , Department of land and resources of Jiangsu Province	September, 2008
Urban-rural Integrated Development	Comprehensive	Provincial	<i>12th five-year plan</i> , Jiangsu provincial government	November, 2010
Village Environment Renovation	Rural Habitation	Provincial	<i>Plan of village environment renovation action</i> , Jiangsu provincial government	September, 2011
Ecological Modernization, Beautiful China	Comprehensive	National	18th central committee of CPC, Central Committee of CPC	November, 2012
Village Environment Renovation	Rural Habitation	National	<i>Guides on village environment renovation</i> , General Office of State Council	May, 2014

Source: compiled from diverse official documents by authors

The Evolution of the Program-driven Rural Governance

Following upper-level discourse

The discourse system plays a crucial and intermediate role in the formulation and development of the program-driven governance. For the local government, the upper-level discourse provides a rhetoric channel to rescale their rural program practice in two ways. One is the scaling-up process. To expand the influence of their pioneering work, local governments purposely follow the central discourse to seize the initiative in the propagation. The other is scope enlargement within the territory. To maximize the effectiveness of the rural programs, the local government may magnify the connotation of a program to include specific projects. A comparison of the representative programs at the Central (see Table 1) and local level (see Table 2) clearly shows the process of following and using upper-level discourse.

Table 2 Representative rural programs at the local level

Theme	Official Document Title	Territory	Initiation Time	Remarks
Urban-rural Coordinated Development	<i>Suggestions for speeding up urban-rural coordinated development</i>	Nanjing	May, 2005	A policy echoing the central strategy in 2003
New Socialist Countryside Construction	<i>Suggestions on urban-rural coordinated development and speeding up new socialist countryside construction</i>	Nanjing	March, 2006	A policy echoing the central strategy in 2005
Coordinated Development, Urban-rural Integrated Development	<i>Action outline on speeding up coordinated development and building new Nanjing of urban-rural integrated development</i>	Nanjing	August, 2010	A milestone document transformed from previous hanging policies to concrete actions with explicit route map of implementation
Five Flowers	<i>Suggestions for promoting sustainable development of agritourism</i>	Jiangning	September, 2011	'Five Flowers' was not put forward in this document but the document was based on the good performance of the five pioneer villages
Urban-rural Coordinated Development	<i>Suggestions for insisting urban-rural coordination and strengthening agriculture and rural construction</i>	Nanjing	October, 2011	Absorb the provincial <i>village environment renovation action</i> , which was released in September 2011, into the program
Village Environment Renovation	<i>Suggestions on environment renovation implementation of beautiful countryside in Nanjing</i>	Nanjing	March, 2012	A policy echoing the provincial project in 2011. The wording of 'beautiful countryside' was first appeared in local official document
Beautiful Countryside	<i>Implementation outline on beautiful countryside construction of Nanjing</i>	Nanjing	May, 2013	The wording of 'beautiful countryside' was explicitly used and supported by a series of follow-up projects
Rural Reform, Urban-rural Integrated Development	<i>Suggestions for deepening comprehensive rural reform and speeding up urban-rural integrated development</i>	Nanjing	March, 2014	A policy echoing the 3rd plenary session of 18th central committee of CPC in November 2011, and CPC annual conference of rural works in January 2014
Beautiful Countryside	<i>Suggestions on hundred demonstration & thousand renovation project and beautiful countryside construction</i>	Jiangning	March, 2014	Evolve from pioneer villages and demonstration area to full coverage of the beautiful countryside construction

Source: compiled from official documents of CPC Nanjing, CPC Jiangning, GOV (abbreviation of government and hereafter) Nanjing and GOV Jiangning by authors

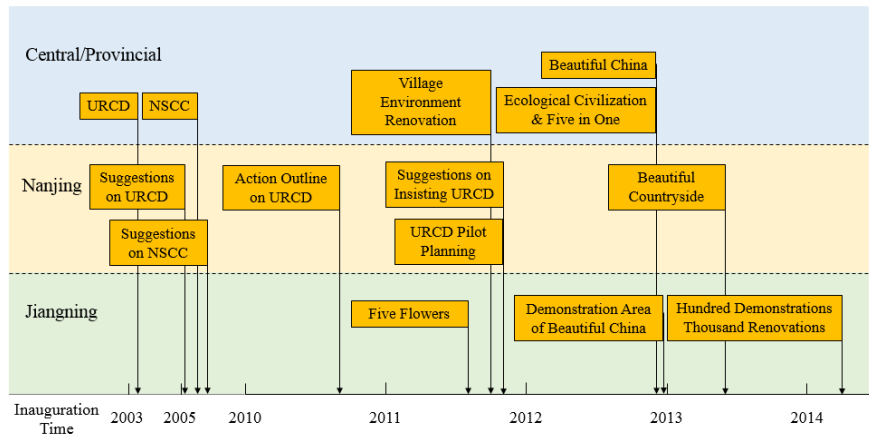


Figure 2 Discourses of rural programs at various levels

The connection of discourses at various levels is revealed by the time series analysis (see Figure 2). Generally speaking, the programs from Nanjing and Jiangning pay more attention to specific projects than those from the central/provincial level. It is easy to note that the program density along the time axis is not regular. Before 2010, the documents issued by Nanjing government were routine echoes to the central instructions of URCD and NSCC. However, since the document titled *‘Action outline on speeding up coordinated development and building new Nanjing of urban-rural integrated development’* was released in August 2010, the rural programs in Nanjing entered a booming age. Since then, rural programs have transformed from previous policies on paper to concrete actions with explicit roadmap.

Another important node was the 18th CPC national congress in November 2012. In this power handover conference, the central committee released the ideological slogan of ‘Ecological Modernization’ and ‘Beautiful China’. The keynote report articulated that, the overall layout of socialism with Chinese characteristics should be a pattern of ‘Five in One’, including the construction of economy, politics, culture, society, as well as the new added concept of ‘Ecological Modernization’. As a local response, the countryside, especially in the eastern provinces with intensive man-land relation, has been placed high expectation to practice the central ideology. Seizing the buzzword ‘beautiful’, seemingly conferred by the central and irresistible to the masses, Nanjing and Jiangning tactfully advertised their pioneer work with the discourse of ‘Beautiful Countryside’. The proactive echo definitely scaled up local practice to get legitimacy and facilitated propaganda.

Combining Table 2 and Figure 2 in the analysis, we can also discern the scope enlargement trajectory in local governments’ terminology. At the level of Jiangning, the beautiful countryside campaign commenced from five spontaneous village experiments of agritourism in late 2011, namely ‘Five Flowers’. On the basis of preliminary success, the implementation area of the program was extended to the western region of Jiangning in late 2012, with the name of ‘Demonstration Area of Beautiful China Beautiful Countryside’. Furthermore, in 2014, Jiangning launched the program of ‘Hundred Demonstration & Thousand Renovation’. Aiming at full coverage of the beautiful countryside construction, officials of Jiangning government expanded their initiatives greatly.

Agency evolution

Apart from the discourse system, the reorganization of the state agency is also examined to reveal the governance changes. To facilitate the program-driven governance, temporary agencies have been established to coordinate the programs from different bureaus and commissions (see Figure 3). In this process, the government gains unprecedented capacity in the coordination of the rural governance.

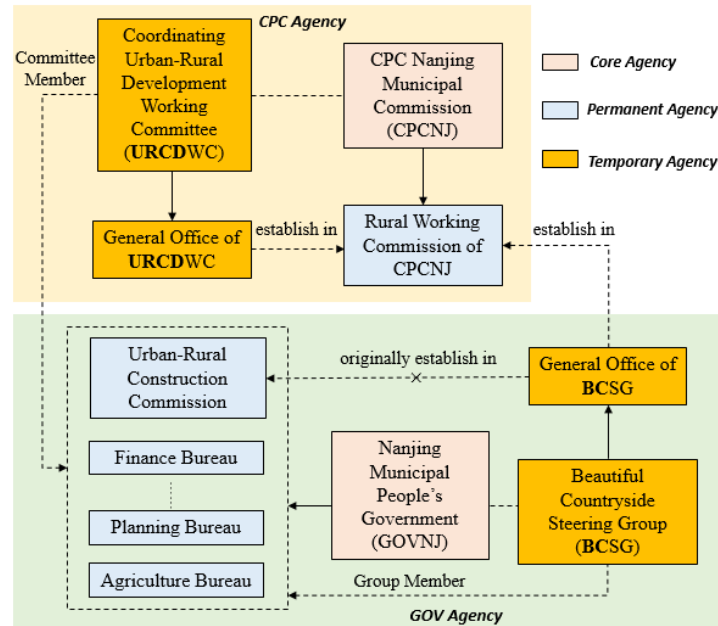


Figure 3 Integration of temporary agencies into permanent agencies

As is well-known, the permanent state agencies at the local level have two main systems: the GOV (abbreviation of government and hereafter) system and the CPC system. The GOV agencies focus on executive works under the guide of the party. Concerning rural issues, it involves commissions or bureaus of urban-rural construction, development and reform, finance, planning, land resources, agriculture, etc. In contrast, the agencies of CPC often have a broad administrative field, corresponding to more than one department in the GOV systems. They are more concentrated on policy-making and affair-coordination than the GOV agencies. The rural work commission of CPCNJ (abbreviation of CPC of Nanjing and hereafter) is such kind of CPC agency. Compared to the agriculture bureau, which is committed to rural productivity promotion, its mission mainly lies in optimizing production relations. Hence, it has powerful coordination capacity in the rural governance.

In the agency evolution driven by programs, two temporary agencies were established under the leadership of CPC and GOV respectively. From the wording of ‘working committee’ and ‘steering group’, we can sense the difference between the two main agency systems (see Figure 3).

The ‘Coordinating Urban-rural Development Working Committee’ (hereafter URCDWC) was set up in the document of URCD action outline in 2010. As the supreme authority for directing and coordinating rural works, the configuration of URCDWC ensures its predominance. It is co-chaired by party secretary and mayor of Nanjing. Directors of relevant departments of CPC and

GOV are committee members. Its general office was set up in aforesaid rural working commission of CPCNJ. In charge of the routine business, the general office functions as the standing body of the committee. Their major tasks include the coordination of programs from multiple channels (e.g. summarizing the application from various departments, distributing funds for operation, avoiding duplication of funding), investigation and data gathering, implementation evaluation, document drafting, etc³. URCDWC mobilizes the governance capacity at different levels and divisions to the maximum extent.

Through the relocation story of the general office of ‘Beautiful Countryside Steering Group’ (hereafter BCSG), we can notice the expanding power as well as flexibility for the government in rural governance. In fact, it was in March 2012, before the 18th CPC Congress, when the discourse of ‘Beautiful Countryside’ first appeared in the official document of Nanjing (see Table 2). The document was a routine echo to the provincial program of ‘Village Environment Renovation Action’ (see Table 1, hereafter VERA) but was extended to a discourse of ‘Beautiful Countryside’ by Nanjing. Because VERA was mainly initiated by the provincial department of housing and urban-rural construction, the general office of BCSG was attached to the corresponding commission of GOVNJ. However, after the launch of the booming program campaign under the theme of ‘Beautiful Countryside’ of 18th CPC Congress, housing and urban-rural construction commission of Nanjing cannot handle so many coordinating affairs. The general office of BCSG then relocated and was put under the rural working commission of CPCNJ, indicating its importance similar to URCDWC.

The Measures in the Program-driven Rural Governance

It seems that the program-driven rural governance operates in a top-down manner, with central/provincial government setting up the programs and the local government implementing the programs by allocating project-funding for grassroots government and even peasant organizations. However, this tangible interaction is not always the whole story. There are at least two types of interactions that are not top-down directly. The first involves intangible interactions between local government and central/provincial government in which local government seeks to gain recognition from the upper-level government for its programs—a process of legitimation. The first interaction then helps build a second intangible interaction by increasing government’s capacity to mobilize resources from lower-level governments (if any) and non-government stakeholders, mainly enterprises, peasants and social organizations—a process of resource mobilization (see Figure 4). Thus, local governments also play an active role in the rural governance.

³ Interview with officials in Rural Working Commission of CPCNJ, 20140725

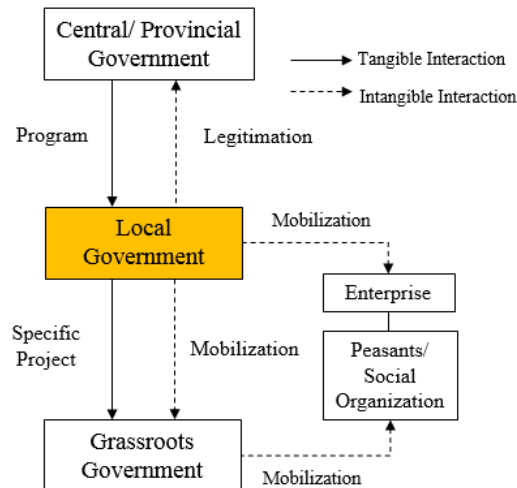


Figure 4 Tangible and intangible intergovernmental interactions in rural programs

Legitimation and program packaging

Legitimacy here can be understood as the acceptance and recognition of a program by the upper-level government which governs the low-level governments in China. In some cases of central and western regions of China, it is contended that the mere launch of a programmatic campaign from the central may result in a chaotic condition in local practice (Li, 2007). Nevertheless, the circumstance in Nanjing is just on the contrary. Nanjing has many local initiatives of its own that need to be endorsed by the central government. The central possesses the ultimate power, through the law, propaganda, etc. The local government can gain the legitimacy with its positive echo to the strategic slogan or program from the central. Only when the local government gains the legitimacy and the blessing from central government, can it realize the ambitious plan for governing and developing the countryside.

We can examine the legitimation process in detail from the following gossip peddled by an official. During an inspection visit to rural Jiangning on 20th November 2012, just one week after the closing of 18th CPC Congress, the mayor of Nanjing came up with the idea ‘to build Jiangning into a demonstration area of beautiful China, beautiful countryside’. He wrote it down on a piece of paper right away and handed over to the Jiangning officials around⁴. In this story, the local leader keenly grasped the ideological signal released in the party congress. ‘Beautiful China’, which has been a buzzword nowadays, emphasizes ecological aspect in the local development. Hatted in this vogue cap, the pioneer practices in Jiangning obtained sufficient legitimacy, placing the grassroots in an irresistible situation.

Under the premise of legitimacy, local government employs the measure of program packaging to amplify its impact in rural governance. In this process, the local government is not just a deliverer, receiving and passing on the fiscal packages; but more like a packer, embedding the rural works into programs to realize own ambition (She & Chen, 2011). Through the case in Nanjing, we found that the measure of program packaging embodies at least two types in practice.

⁴ Interview with an official in Planning Bureau of Nanjing, 20140721

First, the rural programs have a reproductive capacity of themselves. Many new programs have been developed to promote the development of villages. Under the legitimacy of ‘rural issues matter’, the program investment in rural grassroots is not merely confined to a single program, but a chain of programs (Xun & Bao, 2007). Since 2011, when first selected as the experimental site of agritourism, the title of Shitang village in Jiangning has evolved from ‘Five Flower’ to ‘Featured Model Village of Beautiful Countryside’. As soon as one specific program touched upon Jiangning, the government always gave the priority to Shitang village. With the addition of social capital, the simulacra making of ‘Shitang Home’ during the past three years has attracted more than 100 million RMB⁵. The infrastructures in the village were improved significantly. Farmhouse inns and restaurants were opened up, the sewerage system was established, cottage façades were painted in a uniform local style, and even the deserted ponds around the dwellings were cleaned and dredged. Those programs were derived from different departments but overlapped in package series upon the same village. Through this process, Shitang village becomes self-sufficiency in the rural economy that led by ecotourism.

Second, program packaging also involves some hidden agenda. With the intention of balancing funding, some programs of rural land are included in the comprehensive plan. In terms of financial incentive, it supports the program-driven governance for the government. But it may have a negative effect on the land properties of villagers.

With the deepening of the URCD program in Nanjing, the rural works of Nanjing in 2012 focused on the sub-program of ‘Comprehensive Rural Land Consolidation’. This program was originally designated to release construction land and promote large-scale cultivation in the countryside (Huang et al., 2014). Packaged as a URCD sub-program, the legitimacy of stereotypical land acquisition from the villages was justified. It was implemented more easily, saving a lot of social costs for Jiangning GOV. Due to the introduction of the linking policy between the increase of urban construction land and the decrease of rural construction land, the saved quota from the program can be transferred to the city and sold out in the land market. According to an internal agreement signed by the head of Jiangning GOV and Nanjing GOV⁶, the latter would allocate 100 million RMB to each pilot sub-district in Jiangning for the land consolidation program. However, there was a precondition that, the Jiangning GOV should sell the saved land quota to Nanjing GOV at the price of 500 thousand RMB per Mu⁷. With the net revenue generated by price gap, Nanjing GOV promised to subsidize the rural programs of remaining sub-districts in a rolling way.

Rural planning

Rural planning is a technical measure to underpin the program-driven governance. It acts as the link between preceding legitimation and the following mobilization in the governance. Though rural planning, the packaged rural programs are unpacked into explicit projects and then distributed to specific locations.

The allocation of the program fund undergoes a series of well-designed standard

⁵ Interview with an official in Rural Working Commission of CPC Jiangning, 20140714

⁶ Document titled ‘Commitment for returning start-up fund in Comprehensive Rural Land Consolidation program’

⁷ Mu is a Chinese area unit. 15 mu is equal to a hectare, thus 1 mu equals to 666.67 m². The land price in Nanjing city is around 5 million RMB per mu, about 10 times of the purchasing price from Jiangning.

procedures—program initiation, application, supervision, assessment, etc. Among them, rural planning is the primary outline that guides the distribution of the state fund and political resources. As it is confirmed by an official in the provincial office of VERA program, *‘the funding of the program is collected from various departments in the provincial government, such as departments of poverty relief, water resources, land resources, agriculture and so on. However, the reason why the general office is set up in the Construction Department is that, it is in charge of the rural planning works. In our rural planning, we classify two million villages in Jiangsu into two types, the well-off living village and ordinary village. Some demonstrating villages are also selected from the former. Furthermore, we formulate different guidelines accordingly. This planning list is an important database for dealing with the rural issues now, even to other programs’.*⁸

The planning regime mandates very detailed standards for the countryside construction (Bray, 2013). Before the formation of Beautiful Countryside Planning, planners had conducted a full-covered survey on featured resources in rural Nanjing. The cultural heritages, historical sites, handicraft arts were all recorded and graded according to their conservation value. In the rural planning, the project library is a crucial tool for the program implementation and evaluation. It is not only about the distribution of workload among governments, but also a coordinated list of specific projects sorted by location and division. Through so-called ‘projectization’, local governments can draw clear lines of responsibility to grassroots governments. The project library also provides with explicit criteria for program evaluation by the deadline and attached requirements. One official, who is in charge of the rural planning in the Planning Bureau of Nanjing, commented as follows in our interview: *“Projectization is an obvious trend in the planning making process. In the formation of rural planning, we strongly emphasize its operability. To avoid project overlap, we need to integrate projects from different divisions together. Thus, it is required that every rural planning should be enclosed with explicit ‘project library’. Without such kind of project list, the grassroots governments will find it hard to carry out the planning’.*⁹

Mobilization

For the sake of successful implementation of programs, resource mobilization plays a vital role in the program campaign, similar to many other social movements (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). This mobilization process is premised by the two measures above—the legitimacy carried by programs and the projects refined by rural planning. To maximize the governance effect in rural programs, more manpower, material resources and funds are needed to fill the program basket. Apart from the governments, rural folks, private enterprises and social organizations are involved in the process.

The programs embed themselves with a mechanism of intergovernmental mobilization. In the provincial VERA program, Jiangsu government required local governments to provide certain amount of ‘matching fund’ and set it as an essential condition for start-up fund application. In the 2010 actual budget of this program, the central government spent 158 million RMB in the countryside of South Jiangsu while the local governments invested 273 million, nearly twice that

⁸ Interview with an official in Housing and Urban-rural Construction Department of Jiangsu, 20140709

⁹ Interview with an official in Planning Bureau of Nanjing, 20140721

of the central fund¹⁰. In this case, the fund from the central acts as the ‘bait’ to lure investment from local governments.

Private and voluntary stakeholders are also mobilized to participate in the program-driven governance. It means that the programs can realize ‘self-expansion’ (Chen, 2013) and penetrate into the rural society. As one village cadre in one of the pilot villages in Jiangning admitted to us, the initial program from the municipal government was an important wind indicator for local capital. The ‘attention of higher government’ implied strength in their business propagation and good cooperating attitude of the peasants. For the peasants, they tended to focus on the implementation effect in the short-term. Thus the success of the initial program was very important. In addition, the development vision stated in the rural planning was also a significant tool to stimulate peasants’ enthusiasm in program participation¹¹.

Conclusion

Based on the case study in Nanjing, this paper sheds light on how the series of rural programs are shaping the new mode of rural governance in China, especially from the perspective of intergovernmental relation changes. It attempts to contribute to the rural governance theory with new paradigm and characteristics. Although further research needs to be carried out to depict a full picture of the new rural governance mode, some preliminary findings can be obtained.

First, a new mode of rural governance driven by rural programs is emerging in China. Under the crisis of rural governance and consensus of ‘rural issues matter’, the countryside is targeted as the focus of state policy in China. Facilitated by the intergovernmental fiscal reform, rural programs are initiated with earmarked fund to support the countryside. Through those rural programs, the state power in the rural governance has been enhanced unprecedentedly. The governments penetrate into the rural governance. Along with the enterprises and other social organizations, they constitute the exogenous mechanism in the new mode of rural governance.

Second, the local government employs the measures of legitimation and mobilization in the program-driven rural governance. Through these measures, the enthusiasm among different stakeholders in the rural governance is catalyzed, and the smooth operation of the programs is ensured. Between the bilateral interactions of legitimation and mobilization, rural planning acts as a technical measure to link them together. Through the planning regime, the rural programs are unpacked into explicit projects and then distributed to specific locations.

Third, there are intensive intergovernmental interactions in the new mode of rural governance. This new mode incorporates dominant multi-level governance. It demonstrates a vertical layering of the governance process, owing to the negotiated exchanges and complementary interactions between governments at central/provincial, local and grassroots levels (Peters & Pierre, 2001; Pierre & Stoker, 2000). We can unravel the characteristics of the multi-level governance as follows.

Rural programs are generally initiated and led by central/provincial governments. Prioritizing the

¹⁰ Data from unpublished document, Jiangsu Finance Department, 2011

¹¹ Interview with a village cadre in Jiangning, 20140527

rural issues, they invest a large amount of resources in propagation and funds, and have the final word in the approval and legitimation of the programs. However, central/provincial governments only provide rough guidelines and little seed funds in the concrete programs. They delegate most of policy implementation work to local governments.

Given the most discretionary power, local governments handle the programs in a flexible way. They successfully harness the discourse and agency configuration. Taking the opportunity of central attention, local governments propose and fund many new programs, which significantly improve the village conditions. However, some negative programs are also packaged together to balance the fund gap.

The grassroots governments, who had the tightest relation with folks in rural governance previously, have no visible autonomy in our case. They are more like executors of the policy, acting as agent to follow orders or guidelines passed down from above.

Generally speaking, it seems that a new mode of rural governance driven by programs is in the making. However, it does not mean that the almighty government would solve all the rural issues. Programs have brought significant transformation in the countryside while also triggered new governance problem among the grassroots. This new governance mode is beneficial to the peasants in some cases, but may be not beneficial in other cases. To fully understand the program-driven governance from the perspective of grassroots, detailed case studies at the village level will be conducted in further research.

Acknowledgement

The paper is based on research funded by National Natural Science Foundation of China 41329001. The research is also supported by Research Centre for Urban and Regional Development, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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