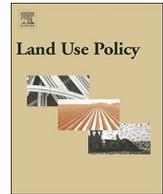




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Targeted poverty alleviation and land policy innovation: Some practice and policy implications from China

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is the common challenge faced by the international community. The human society has never ceased to struggle against poverty. China was once the developing country with the largest rural poor population in the world. Facing the decreasing effect of economic input to poverty reduction, land policy innovations could contribute to promoting poverty alleviation, particularly in China, where the defects in policy making is regarded as a major factor in rural poverty. This study explores the institutional innovation of China's poverty alleviation since 2013 and further reveals the mechanism behind land policy innovation promoting the targeted poverty alleviation based on a case study of Songjiagou village of Fuping county, Hebei province. We found that the Chinese central government has innovated the mechanism for the TPA to lift the remaining rural poor out of poverty by 2020 as scheduled. Implementing the TPA could confront the labor, capital and land dilemmas. Combined land policy innovations and land engineering with the ex situ poverty alleviation relocation (ESPAR) can help to break the institutional barriers. We argue that land policy innovations and the ESPAR not only contributes to poverty reduction and improve living conditions of the poor, but also needs to guard against its potential risk. These findings can provide policymakers with a sound scientific basis for poverty reduction planning and decisions in China and other poor countries.

1. Introduction

Poverty alleviation is a global challenge (Bapna, 2012; Griggs et al., 2013). The international community has never stopped to narrow the rural-urban gap and eliminate poverty (Mani et al., 2013; Haushofer and Fehr, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015; Tollefson, 2015). The academic has carried out extensive and intensive studies on the definition, theories, measurements and types of poverty and anti-poverty strategies (Du et al., 2005; Zhang and Wan, 2006; Ravallion and Chen, 2007; Wang and Alkire, 2009; Montalvo and Ravallion, 2010; Glauben et al., 2012; Yu, 2013; Rodríguez-Pose and Hardy, 2015; Alkire and Seth, 2015; Liu et al., 2016; Wang, 2017). Different disciplines have their own understanding and cognition on poverty. Economics focuses on the basic needs of individuals from income and consumption aspects, and Sociology focuses on social exclusion. New institutional economics links poverty problem with the system or institutions, arguing that the system is a determinant of economic performance and that an effective system promotes economic growth (Sen, 1985; 1999; Wagle, 2002; Park

et al., 2002; Alkire and Foster, 2011; Alkire and Sumner, 2013; Bossert et al., 2013; Wang, 2017). The classical theories of poverty or anti-poverty include the Vicious Circle of Poverty (Nurkse, 1952), the Low-level Equilibrium Trap (Nelson, 1956), the Critical Effort (Leibenstein, 1957), the Circular and accumulative causation (Myrdal, 1957), the Multidimensional Poverty Theory (Sen, 1999), the Property Right Theory (Coase, 1937), the Economic Growth Theory (North, 1955) and the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty (Gottschalk et al., 1994; Corcoran and Adams, 1997; Bird, 2007). Other relevant studies mainly focuses on the poverty line (Chen et al., 2013), the types of poverty (Jalan and Ravallion, 2000; Chen and Ravallion, 2007; Duclos et al., 2010; Glauben et al., 2012; Ward, 2016), the causes of poverty (Jalan and Ravallion, 2000; Glauben et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2005), vulnerability to poverty (McCulloch and Calandrino, 2003; Ward, 2016; Cao et al., 2016), multi-dimensional poverty measurement (Wang and Alkire, 2009; Yu, 2013; Alkire and Santos, 2014; Alkire and Seth, 2015; Alkire et al., 2015; Liu and Xu, 2016), eco-environment protection and poverty alleviation (Ferraro and Hanauer, 2014; Agrawal, 2014),

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raising food production and poverty reduction (Fischer and Hajdu, 2015), the anti-poverty effect of economic input (Ravallion, 2001; Ravallion and Chen, 2007; Montalvo and Ravallion, 2010; Barrett and Carter, 2013; Lü, 2015; Gao et al., 2015) and mapping of poverty (Jean et al., 2016). These studies focus more on the evolution of poverty theories and its multi-dimensional measurements, but less attention was paid to how to guide anti-poverty practice.

China's poverty problem¹ has attracted wide attention from academics at home and abroad due to its various types and complex causes as well as arduous task of anti-poverty (Du et al., 2005; Zhang and Wan, 2006; Ravallion and Chen, 2007; Montalvo and Ravallion, 2010; Glauben et al., 2012; Yu, 2013; Li et al., 2015a, 2015b; Ward, 2016; Lo et al., 2016). Poor area has been the short-board of economic growth in China, which is characterized by a large area and population sunk in poverty². At the beginning of the founding of new China, the country has a large poverty-stricken population in the rural areas. Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has spared no effort to reduce poverty.³ Over the past three decades, China has achieved the millennium development goal of halving poverty ahead of schedule, making outstanding contributions to global poverty alleviation (UN, 2015; Liu et al., 2015a, 2015b). Despite this, China is still a developing country with a large number of people living in extreme poverty (Liu, 2016). China's relative poverty problem is prominent and the deep-seated contradictions restricting the development of poverty-stricken areas still exist, and the phenomenon of returning to poverty happens occasionally (Liu, 2016; Liu et al., 2016). These pose great challenges for China to achieve the goal to become a comprehensive well-off society by 2020 (Long et al., 2010, 2011; Long and Liu, 2016). Institutional defect is also considered to be a major cause of poverty (Zhou, 2006; Bowles et al., 2006; Wang and Duan, 2015; Liu et al., 2016). Institutional factors affecting China's effectiveness of poverty alleviation mainly include land system, household registration system and ecological environment protection policies (Dong, 1996; Uchida et al., 2005; Heilig et al., 2006; Emran and Hou, 2013; Zhang et al., 2015). Therefore, institutional innovations play an important role in promoting poverty alleviation (Milder et al., 2010; Pamuk et al., 2015; Yan, 2015; Liu et al., 2016). Although these studies have noted that institutional or policy innovations are conducive to the promotion of poverty alleviation, few studies have focused on how these innovations, particularly land policy, can promote poverty alleviation. Thus, the key aim of this study was to investigate the mechanism behind land policy innovation and land system reform promoting poverty alleviation and development. The specific objectives of this study are to: first analyze the targeted poverty alleviation (TPA) strategy and the ex-situ poverty alleviation relocation; then examine the land, funds and population dilemma faced by implementing the TPA; and finally provide a framework to explain the mechanism behind land policy innovation and rural land system reform promoting the TPA by a case study. These finding not only contribute to deepening the basic theory of poverty and comprehending the mechanism behind land policy innovation promoting poverty reduction, but also merit particular attention from policy makers in China and Asia-Africa-Latin America countries.

2. Targeted poverty alleviation in China

2.1. China's poverty alleviation since 1949

2.1.1. Six stages of China's anti-poverty

China has been committed to the eradication of poverty since the

founding of the Communist Party of China. The country's anti-poverty programs can be roughly divided into 6 stages (Fig. 1): (1) The traditional relief-type approach (1949–1978). At the beginning of the founding of new China (1949), the country's economic development level is very low and the whole society was in a widespread poverty status (Zhao, 2013). During this period, China's poverty alleviation was mainly to solve the problem of human existence and took a blood-transfusion-type poverty relief (Liu et al., 2017a); (2) Institutional reforms promoting poverty alleviation (1978–1985). At the end of 1978, there were more than 250 million poor population living on less than the national poverty line in rural China. The system was considered to be the main factor that hinders the development of the society (Yan, 2015). Rural economic system reform that replaces collective management system with household responsibility system gave farmers' the autonomy of agricultural production and greatly arouse their enthusiasm, thus increasing grain production and promoting the rapid development of rural economy in China (Yan, 2015). The country's poor population decreased from 250 million in 1978–125 million in 1985; (3) Large-scale development-oriented poverty alleviation (1986–1993). During this period, some key measures have been taken to anti-poverty, i.e., setting up special help-the-poor work units and allocating special funds. The rural poor population dropped from 125 million in 1986–80 million in 1993. (4) Tackling key problems of poverty relief (1994–2000). During the period, China implemented the National 'Eight-Seven' Poverty Alleviation Plan, aiming to solve the basic food and clothing needs of 80,000 rural poor in around 7 years (Park and Wang, 2001). The rural poor population dropped from 80 million to 32 million during the period 1994–2000 (Yan, 2015). (5) Poverty reduction policy in the new century (2001–2013). At the turn of the twenty-first century, China's poverty alleviation faced new challenges and it promulgated the Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development Program (2001–2010). In 2011, the country promulgated and implemented the Outline for Development-oriented Poverty Reduction for China's Rural Areas (2011–2020). The Outline delimited 14 contiguous poor areas with special difficulties and identifies these areas as the main battlefield for poverty alleviation (Yan, 2015).⁴ (6) The TPA since 2013. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the TPA strategy. Poverty alleviation has been put on the agenda of China's 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development for the first time.

2.1.2. Major achievements and challenges in China's poverty alleviation

The first Millennium Development Goal (MDG 1) set by the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 was to halve the proportion of the world's people between 1990 and 2015 (UN, 2015). The United Nations has adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable developments in 2015 and put 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The first SDG target is to end extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030 (Griggs et al., 2013). Globally, more than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty over the last two decades due to global, regional, national and local joint efforts (UN, 2015). In developing regions, the number of people living in extreme poverty, defined as getting by on less than \$1.25 a day has declined by nearly half, dropping from 1.96 billion in 1981–1.01 billion in 2011. But excluding China, this figure is around 927 billion in 2011, the same as it was 1981 (1.1 billion) (Fig. 2). The global drop in the percentage of population living in extreme poverty can be largely attributable to China's poverty reduction efforts (UN, 2015). China has lifted more than 700 million people out of poverty during the period 1980–2011 (UN, 2015).

Furthermore, China's rural poor population has dropped from 250 million in 1978–70.17 million in 2014 and the corresponding poverty headcount ratio has decreased from 30.7% to 7.2%⁵ (NBS, 2015). The

¹ Poverty in this paper refers only to rural poverty in China.

² The poor area refers to the area with poor population. Poor population refers to the population living below the national poverty line. China's poor areas or poverty-stricken areas include the 14 contiguous poor areas with particular difficulties, 832 poverty counties and 128000 poor villages.

³ http://www.china.org.cn/china/Off_the_Wire/2016-10/17/content_39504308.htm.

⁴ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-11/16/c_131249948.htm.

⁵ The headcount ratio refers to the proportion of people below the poverty line to the

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