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# Impact of Mental Poverty on Rural Economic Development

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**Abstract** This paper introduces the definition of mental poverty and the status quo of mental poverty in China's rural areas. Mental poverty in China's rural areas embodies the following aspects: the sense of parochialism is serious; the small farmer consciousness is strong; there is misgiving about identity. This paper analyses the reason of mental poverty influencing farmers' behaviour model and rural economic development. Mental poverty influences the farmers' changing current situation; mental poverty influences the rural population structure; mental poverty influences the rural normal order. The countermeasures and proposals are put forward to obviate mental poverty in rural areas as follows: first, strengthen farmers' consciousness of main body, and improve farmers' psychological feeling; second, coordinate urban-rural development, and strengthen farmers' social identity degree; third, increase inputs into cultural building, and promote farmers' quality; fourth, open up mind, and encourage the outflow of labour forces.

**Key words** Mental poverty, Rural economy, Material poverty, China

China is a large agricultural country, where nearly 2/3 of the population concentrates in rural areas, so maintaining the stable development of rural areas is the key to building moderately prosperous society and new socialist countryside, and also an important part of comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of China's economy and society. In recent years, with economic development, academic world is increasingly concerned about the significance of human subjective factors to the economic and social development, especially psychological factors. Although China has adopted many measures to promote rural economic development, such as adjusting industrial structure, increasing rural financial services, strengthening financial support, and optimizing regional distribution, to make most of the regions shake off poverty, the phenomenon of farmers' poverty still exists, which can be reflected in two aspects: the first is the widening gap of income gap; the second is the imbalance of psychological development. Numerous studies suggest that the psychological problem of farmers in the current environment of social changes are ignored, as a significant obstacle to the rural development process in China, having a serious impact on the sustainable development of China's rural economy. Through the survey, we find that after the process of urbanization, the farmers' self-regulation capacity is not strong, and often there are inner conflicts, resulting in uneven psychological development, and the negative psychological experience such as anxiety and depression<sup>[1]</sup>, seriously affecting farmers' motivation, behavioral preferences and production behaviour patterns, thus directly affecting their income increase and accumulation of human capital. Therefore, finding out

farmers' psychological problems, eliminating psychological barriers and solve the mental poverty, and making the psychology of farmers also keep up with the pace of rapid modern economic development, is one of problems we should focus on in current rural development. Mental poverty of the farmers, in many ways, reflects backwardness of farmers.

## 1 Mental poverty and its manifestation in China's rural areas

**1.1 Definition of mental poverty** According to American scholar Ingles's definition of mental poverty, relative to the material poverty, it is the state that human morals, beliefs, ideals, values, customs, habits, and other living ideas and values, can not meet the practical needs of life, lagging behind main mode of material production in the society. Mental poverty can be reflected in many aspects: the educational level is low, and the scientific and cultural knowledge is short; there is a mentality of being accustomed to the status quo and used to traditional experience; the concept is stale and the thought is conservative; the dependence mentality is serious and it lacks motivation; there is a shortage of cultural and recreational facilities, and there are few spiritual activities; the spirit is low and inferiority complex is strong. Mental poverty is the result of material poverty, and also the important reason for long-term economic poverty in modern rural areas ( Yu Dehua, 2003)<sup>[2]</sup>. In research of modern rural economic development and social psychology, we should pay enough attention to the problem of mental poverty in rural areas.

## 1.2 The status quo of mental poverty in China's rural areas

Social psychology believes that as for the people living in certain society, their ideology, cultural values, knowledge, skills and habits must be in line with the level of development in this social environment, keep pace with development change of this social environment; if the two can keep consistency and syn-

chronization, then the people living in the society, in terms of mentality and behaviour, are in a positive, stable and harmonious state; on the contrary, if the two cannot keep consistency and synchronization, then the people living in the society, will have a psychological confusion, perplexity and disorder, triggering a behavioral disorder, eventually leading to social problems, and impeding social development and progress<sup>[3]</sup>. However, at present most of China's farmers show relatively backward psychological quality in consumer mindset, democracy and legal system, sense of ownership in new rural development, culture and other aspects. The phenomena of viewing sons as better than daughters, and being contented with a small amount of wealth, are serious, making the policies conducive to the rural development fail to be absorbed and digested, advanced production methods fail to be better used, and farmers' ethos of production and living in rural areas fail to be improved. Long-term economic pressures cause enormous psychological pressure to them, resulting in a number of psychological problems, which can be demonstrated in the following phenomena.

**1.2.1** The sense of parochialism is serious. Modern farmers are still stereotyped by lack of enterprising spirit, stubbornness, rigidity and other parochialism. China's multitudinous poor farmers are long shackled by the traditional farming culture, with profound influence. Many farmers have become accustomed to the rigid lifestyle and followed the usual rules and regulations, who have serious consciousness of relying on land, and are used to the status quo, while they are nonchalant to the agricultural science and technology knowledge and desire for commodity economy, unwilling to accept new things, which is inconsistent with the requirements of the modernization of agriculture (Du Dan, 2009)<sup>[4]</sup>. Although most of them have a strong desire to break through the tradition, because of the low level of education and lack of agricultural training experience, they have no idea of innovating upon agricultural production modes and how to innovate. It is difficult for them to go beyond the established traditional and antediluvian ideas and order, leading to traditional conservative parochialism and ways of thinking, which has seriously hindered rural economic and social development.

**1.2.2** The small farmer consciousness is strong. Modern society is a competitive society, and the inevitable result of competition is the survival of the fittest. In recent years, China's vast rural areas have undergone tremendous changes, and in this context of dramatic changes, the farmers also increasingly feel the enormous pressure of economic competition in the market, thereby creating a sense of urgency and a sense of crisis, leading to burgeoning of sense of competition. According to the survey, at present most farmers in rural areas can be actively engaged in production and living, and actively pursue the economic benefits of agricultural production. In the process, farmers' self-confidence and self-efficacy are booming. However, due to deep-rooted Chinese traditional peasant mentality, the mentality penetrates into farmers' living and production, and shackles farmers' mind, becoming a huge obstacle to agricul-

tural development, for example, the concepts of short-sightedness, being satisfied with a small wealth, cause the farmers to see the immediate result, but not long-term interests; see local interests, but not holistic interests. Such peasant mentality forms serious impediment to farmers' income increase and long-term development of rural economy.

**1.2.3** There is anxiety about identity. From different dimensions, urban expansion and lack of rural land force rural population to migrate to cities, so that thousands of mainland farmers abandon the traditional land farming, and swarm into cities to work by using low-cost means of transport such as trains and ships, leading to massive "unemployed migrant people" in conflict with the existing household registration system. However, in the long working career, although migrant workers are members of the city, it is difficult for them to integrate into the urban mainstream society, and it generates strong sense of identity anxiety in the course of time. They are keen to do something in the city, but cannot meet needs of physiology, safety, belonging, respect and self-actualization like their counterpart in the city. They remain in between the villages and cities. The long-term anxiety over such "dislocated" identity, erodes the mentality and health of migrant workers, and is likely to be harmful risk to social stability.

## 2 Analysis of the reason of mental poverty influencing farmers' behaviour model and rural economic development

Psychology believes that when people have needs but the needs are not met, it will produce a nervous state of mind. When encountering the objective that can meet needs, this tense psychological state will be transformed into motivation (driving force), and propelled by the inner will and the external environment, people are to engage in certain activities and achieve goals. When the objectives are achieved, then they feel physical or psychological satisfaction, and thus the tense psychological state will be eliminated (Fig. 1), therefore, we believe that psychology is the propellant for behavior, and the psychological state of farmers will affect the motives and behavioral biases of farmers, thus affecting the model of farmers' production behavior.

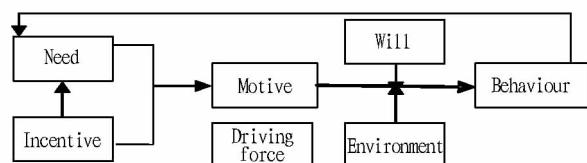


Fig.1 Relations of need, motive and behaviour

**2.1 Mental poverty influences the farmers' changing current situation** China's deep-rooted traditional peasant mentality has made the majority of farmers become accustomed to the rigid way of life, observe all rules and regulations, and used to their position of weakness. They have a serious sense of dependence on the land, content with things as they are, and have weak understanding of agricultural scientific knowledge

and the market economy, unwilling to accept new things, which violates the requirements of the modernization of agriculture. This complacent mentality of being satisfied with a small wealth, is directly responsible for long-term stereotyped mode of production in rural areas of China. Compared to the rapid development of consumption and living expenditure, the rural investment in productive fixed assets is negligible.

**2.2 Mental poverty influences the rural population structure** The mobility of the rural population is insufficient, which has not yet changed the traditional self-sufficient mode of existence. The inherent material basis of agriculture determines people's peasant mentality. Naturally the attitude of viewing sons as better than daughters in small farmer society is still not completely changed, and people's thinking is still confined to the land and backbreaking agriculture. The concepts of "raise children to provide for old age" and "to have a son to carry on the family name" are prevalent. This phenomenon lead directly to the imbalance between men and women in rural areas, and a large number of men receive better education than women. Thus more male farmers separate from agricultural production, to work in city, while the female farmers are left behind in rural areas. As the female labor force is generally weaker than male labor force, so the incomes of women only reach a low level. Thus, the aggravation of mental poverty will lead to structural imbalance of the rural population. The decline in young labor force has an impact on rural economic development, and inevitably produces the following vicious circle: widening gap between urban and rural areas-outflow of human capital-generation of mental poverty-further widening gap between urban and rural areas.

**2.3 Mental poverty influences the rural normal order** The rural feudal mentality is serious, especially religious ideas of feudal superstition. The existence of these ideas of superstition, on one hand, strengthens people's belief in feudal superstition, affects physical and mental health, and impedes the scope and possibility of people accepting new ideas; on the other hand, puts sand in the wheels of progress of socialist civilization building, influences rural order, thwarts the progress of social civilization, and harms the economic and social development in rural areas. First, the clan forces, through collusion, offering official posts and making lavish promises, paying bribery to win votes and other means, campaign for votes for candidates in clan, or directly intervene in and manipulate the grass-roots election, seriously interfering with the normal order in rural areas. Second, the clan forces maintain the economic benefits of the clan, and use clan feelings to provoke fights, seriously intensifying social conflicts in rural areas.

### 3 The countermeasures and proposals for obviating mental poverty in rural areas

**3.1 Strengthen farmers'consciousness of main body and improve farmers' psychological feeling** From the psychological and sociological point of view, each person has a strong desire to be valued. The farmers with mental poverty also hanker for much attention from the party and government.

Therefore, in order to improve the poverty status of China's farmers at present, primarily we should let the farmers feel that they are drawing attention, stimulate farmers' enthusiasm in participating in co-management, increase their awareness of "master" in new countryside construction, enhance the political status of farmers, elevate the farmers' cultural level, and strengthen the farmers' legal awareness. Specifically, we should reinforce farmers' motivation and ability of participating in politics, improve the villagers' autonomous representative conference, village affairs publicizing, villagers' questioning and other systems, so that farmers really enjoy right to know, right to participate, management right and oversight power, so as to strengthen the dominant position of farmers in new rural construction<sup>[5]</sup>.

**3.2 Coordinate urban-rural development and strengthen farmers' social identity degree** Only the farmers have the same social status and treatment with the urban residents, can the status quo of mental poverty of farmers be improved, and rural construction be developed rapidly and smoothly. Therefore, we must strengthen the government's macro-control function, increase financial inputs to rural areas, reform gradually, and implement various agricultural policies of benefiting farmers, so that farmers get tangible benefits, enjoy the same treatment with urban residents in labor and employment, health care, children education, social insurance and public services, feel the resolution and efforts of the party and the government in building new socialist countryside, promote the building of well-off society, to increase farmers' social identity.

**3.3 Increase inputs into cultural building and promote farmers' quality** Contemporary Chinese farmers' psychological contradictions and conflicts, confusion and perplexity, is an inevitable phenomenon of social and cultural transformation in the process of economic globalization. To eliminate the problem of farmers' mental poverty, under the guidance of the party and the government, we must critically inherit and develop spiritual culture in rural areas. First, we should increase the financial support of the state for rural culture. The countryside is an important base of China's cultural building, and the forefront and development basis of developing China's culture. China's cultural undertaking carries the function of educating the farmers. In recent years, the central and provincial financial departments set up special support fund, increase financial support for cultural undertaking in rural areas, make up for lack of funds for construction of rural culture, and promote coordinated development of cultural undertaking between urban and rural areas. Second, we should strengthen rural educational development. Firstly, we must continue to strengthen the emphasis on rural nine-year compulsory education, increase the inputs of public finance to compulsory education in rural areas, and achieve the goal of popularizing nine-year compulsory education and improve the quality of compulsory education comprehensively. Secondly, we should strengthen scientific and technological training for farmers, vigorously develop rural vocational education and adult education, and cultivate educated and skilled

## 5 Conclusion

The production of traditional Chinese medicinal materials is the source for industry of traditional Chinese medicinal materials. The volatility and fluctuation in price and yield of traditional Chinese medicinal materials and instability in quality of traditional Chinese medicinal materials, affect the quality and demand of final product of traditional Chinese medicinal materials, to make the entire industry of traditional Chinese medicinal materials lack market competitiveness. In this regard, in addition to using the government's macro-control, we should rely on market-based instruments to regulate the supply and demand, and avoid risks. By industry chain management of traditional Chinese medicinal materials, we should promote the cultivation, sales, storage and other links of traditional Chinese medicinal materials to take virtuous modernized, industrial and information-based development road.

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new farmers who are good at management and operation. Finally, we should vigorously develop advanced culture, support healthy and beneficial cultural activities, pay attention to morals and create a sound social environment, foster good manners, and promote cultural symbols that are conducive to interpersonal cooperation<sup>[6]</sup>.

**3.4 Open up mind and encourage the outflow of labour forces** Through rural labor mobility, we should make the farmers increase income and social wealth, so that they can exchange ideas with the outside world and realize concept collision, absorb various kinds of external cultural information, and integrate into a new process of cultural development. Through the brunt of a new mode of production and living, we should change the current farmers' parochial mentality, thus the farmers and their future generations will face life with a new mentality, so as to gradually step out of the traditional agricultural society, integrate into the new production mode and lifestyle. Under the impact of external forces, we should make the farmers quickly establish survival and development pattern, concept and behaviour model that adapt to the market economy and industrial civilization, with the spirit of innovation, autonomy, self-reliance and active pursuit, so as to create internal driving force for shaking off poverty and becoming well

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off and strengthening farmers' resolution to cast off poverty and set out on a road to prosperity<sup>[6]</sup>. All in all, we should strengthen farmers' enthusiasm in the process of modernization and avoid mental poverty.

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