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Poverty Occurrence Characteristics of Ancient Towns and Villages in Shanxi Province and Poverty Reduction Countermeasures

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Abstract Based on the questionnaire of 10 sample ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province, we analyze the poverty occurrence characteristics of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province: the poverty incidence in ancient towns and villages is high, with the slow pace of poverty reduction; the regional characteristics of poverty is prominent; there are conspicuous differences in income between residents living in old houses and residents not living in old houses; poverty reduction shows vulnerability and instability. Then we put forward countermeasures for poverty reduction of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province as follows: first, improving the targeting mechanism of poverty in ancient towns and villages; second, speeding up the development of agricultural industrialization in ancient towns and villages; third, advancing internal "urbanization" of ancient towns and villages and new countryside construction; fourth, strengthening infrastructure building in ancient towns and villages; fifth, providing fair and efficient allocation of resources, and reducing regional differences; sixth, promoting the ability of residents in ancient towns and villages to cope with poverty reduction vulnerability.

Key words Ancient towns and villages, Poverty, Occurrence characteristics, Countermeasures for poverty reduction, Shanxi Province

The Report in the Fifth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee pointed out that we should vigorously ensure and improve people's livelihood, increase support to the poverty-stricken areas. The issue of rural poverty is an important constraint of the social and economic development in China, and also the most significant livelihood issue. Over a decade, with the implementation of the *China Rural Poverty Reduction and Development Program*, the rural poverty reduction in China has made great progress, but the rural poverty issue in some areas has not been completely resolved. The rural poverty issue has always been an enormous challenge and an important issue facing China's economic and social development. How to ease and eradicate rural poverty issue becomes the premise of building a new countryside, and the basis for ensuring the balanced economic development in urban and rural areas. Due to characteristics of ancient towns and villages, the task of poverty reduction is arduous. Under the premise of protecting the original construction and ecological environment in the ancient villages and towns from destruction, developing the economy in the ancient towns and villages, and improving the living standards of residents, is the real problem to be solved. Taking ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province as an example, we analyze the poverty occurrence characteristics of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province on the basis of field research in 2010 and the statistics from the relevant departments,

and put forward countermeasures for poverty reduction of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province, to provide a reference for other similar ancient towns and villages.

1 Overview of sample ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province

Shanxi Province has a long history, which is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization. Impacted by long history, multi-ethnic inhabitation, multi-cultural integration, differences in terrain and other factors, Shanxi Province has constructed many ancient villages and towns reflecting the farming culture, business culture of Shanxi, literati culture, crossing culture, military culture and other local characteristics, in the historical process. According to the preliminary statistics, Shanxi Province has 3 500 ancient towns and villages, with the most ancient towns and villages in China. At present, there are 500 well-preserved ancient towns and villages, coupled with 102 ancient towns and villages with the value of preservation, use and development, mainly distributed in southeastern Shanxi, central Shanxi, northwestern Shanxi and border areas, accounting for 2.89% of the ancient towns and villages in whole province, 0.29% of all towns and villages in Shanxi Province.

In this survey, we visit 69 ancient towns and villages in total, and select 10 of them as sample villages, namely, Guoyu Village, Shangzhuang Village, Xiwenxing Village, Shicongtuo Village, Jingsheng Town, Liang Village, Zhangbi Village, Xia-men Village, Qikou Town and Youwei Town. 280 questionnaires are distributed, and 257 valid questionnaires are taken back. The following factors are taken into account when selecting samples: first, the samples are distributed in the regions where Shanxi's ancient towns and villages cluster as far as pos-

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sible (Qinhe River valley, Yellow River valley, Fen River valley, the border regions); second, the samples are representative to some extent in regional ancient towns and villages, such as the ancient towns and villages with economic development at high, medium and low levels in the regions; third, we select the sample villages, on the basis of the village economy, conservation status, architectural value, condition of the basic facilities and other aspects; fourth, the data are desirable.

2 The poverty occurrence characteristics of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province

2.1 The poverty incidence in ancient towns and villages is high, with the slow pace of poverty reduction In 2008, there was 40.07 million rural poor population in China, with poverty incidence of 4.2%; there was 2.59 million rural poor population in Shanxi Province^[1], accounting for 6.46% of total rural poor population in China, with rural poverty incidence in Shanxi Province reaching 7.59%, and poverty incidence in the sample villages 12.07%. In 2009, according to the rural poverty standard of 1196 yuan, it was estimated that there was 35.97 million of rural poor population in China, with poverty incidence of 3.6%; there was 2.174 million of rural poor population in Shanxi Province, with rural poverty incidence in Shanxi Province reaching 5.37%, and poverty incidence in the sample villages 10.69%. In 2010, according to the rural poverty standard of 1274 yuan, it was estimated that there was 26.88 million of rural poor population in China, with poverty incidence of 2.8%; the rural poverty incidence in Shanxi Province reached 4.15%, and the poverty incidence in the sample villages reached 9.87% (Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison of poverty incidence between ancient towns & villages and China's villages, between ancient towns & villages and Shanxi's villages %

Year	Villages in China	Villages in Shanxi Province	Sample villages
2008	4.2	7.59	12.07
2009	3.6	5.37	10.69
2010	2.8	4.15	9.87

Note: Data are from survey in the sample villages and the Chinese socio-economic development statistical database.

From Table 1, we can find that the rural poverty incidence in China tends to decrease year by year, and decline rate climbs incessantly; the rural poverty rate of Shanxi Province declines from 7.59% to 4.15%, but it is still far higher than the rural poverty incidence in China, and the decline rate of poverty incidence is getting smaller and smaller. In recent years, the poverty incidence in sample villages is higher than the rural poverty incidence in Shanxi Province, and the rate of poverty reduction slows down year by year. For example, Qikou Town, Lin County, Shanxi Province, is supported by pro-poor policies ceaselessly, but due to the deviation of protection of ancient buildings from residents' production mode, it is difficult to change the poverty situation in ancient towns and villages mere-

ly relying on anti-poverty funds.

2.2 The regional characteristics of poverty is prominent

According to statistics, there was a population of 35.71 million in Shanxi Province in 2010; of 119 counties (cities, districts) in whole province, there were 57 poor counties, including 35 key counties on the state priority list. As of the end of 2010, there was a poor population of 2.76 million, accounting for 11.8% of the total number of agricultural population. More than 70% of these low-income rural residents are distributed in the concentrated and contiguous Luliang and Taihang poor areas. According to the sampling results of residents in poor villages of Shanxi Province, the per capita net income of rural residents in 57 poor counties reached 3125 yuan in 2010, and the per capita net income of rural residents in 35 key counties on the state priority list was 2594 yuan. 102 villages and towns in Shanxi Province, 14 in designated poor counties, 13 located in the province-designated poor counties. Among 102 ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province, 14 are poor counties determined by the state, and 13 are determined by the province. Affected by the imbalance in the county economic development, the poverty of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province shows conspicuous regional characteristics. The poverty incidence is relatively high in ancient towns and villages, located in Luliang mountainous regions and extremely frigid areas in the northern Shanxi, up to 20.56% and 19.87%, respectively; in other regions, the poverty incidence of ancient towns and villages is 9.63%. In addition, the degree of protection of the ancient towns and villages in different regions is uneven. In some regions with relatively better economic development in Central Shanxi, the quantity of ancient towns and villages protected and developed and the perfection degree of ancient towns and villages protected and developed, is much higher than that in North Shanxi; the quantity of ancient towns and villages protected and developed in Central Shanxi is two times that in South Shanxi, five times that in North Shanxi.

2.3 There are conspicuous differences in income between residents living in old houses and residents not living in old houses

In the same ancient towns and villages of Shanxi Province, there is a great difference in family income of different residents (to a large extent, a difference between residents living in old houses and residents not living in old houses). First, the economic conditions of most residents living in old houses are poor; the old houses fall into disrepair, and the infrastructure is relatively backward, with unsatisfactory living environment, a far cry from modern life demand, so the residents with better conditions choose to purchase new house in the village or cities. In ancient towns and villages, the residents not living in old houses are affluent, and a portion of households have private cars; the decoration of houses also savors of contemporary characteristics; the quality of life of residents is high. Second, in ancient towns and villages, there is a difference in poverty between the original residents living in old houses who have moved to new towns and the residents still staying in old houses. After getting reasonable compensation and relocating, the original residents living in old houses are in a relatively good

living condition; the residents in ancient towns and villages getting no reasonable compensation, choose to still live in old houses and lead a poor life, because it is difficult to compensate for the costs of relocation paid by themselves (Table 2).

Table 2 Per capita household income in sample villages (towns)

Sample villages (towns)	The proportion of number of people living in old houses to total number of people in village//%	Annual per capita income//yuan		
		Average rural households	Households living in old houses	Households not living in old houses
Shangzhuang Village	34	5 000	4 000	5 500
Guoyu Village	38	4 000	3 100	4 500
Shicongtuo Village	11	2 600	1 800	2 700
Qikou Town	10	2 900	2 100	3 000
Zhangbi Village	28	2 800	2 100	3 100
Xiwenxing Village	82	2 600	2 500	3 100
Jingsheng Town	5	5 400	4 200	5 500
Liang Village	16	2 600	1 700	2 800
Xiamen Village	27	4 000	3 100	4 300
Youwei Town	51	2 900	2 600	3 200

Note: Data are from the survey in sample villages, and *Shanxi Statistical Yearbook* (2009).

Table 2 shows that through the comparison between different ancient villages and towns, the number of people in Jingsheng Town living in old houses accounts for 5% of total number of people in whole town, and the annual per capita income of rural households is 5 400 yuan, ranking first in the samples. The number of people in Xiwenxin Village living in old houses accounts for 82% of total number of people in whole village, and the annual per capita income of rural households is only 2 600 yuan, thus Xiwenxin Village is one of the villages with the lowest per capita household income in the sample villages. Through the comparison of per capita household income in the same ancient towns and villages, the annual household income of residents in Shangzhuang Village, who live in old houses, is 4 000 yuan; the annual household income of residents in Shangzhuang Village, who do not live in old houses, is 5 500 yuan. The difference in the annual per capita income of residents who live in old houses and residents who do not live in old houses reaches up to 1 500 yuan.

2.4 Poverty reduction shows vulnerability and instability

There are vulnerability and instability in poverty reduction of ancient towns and villages^[2], and in particular, there is instability in livelihood situation of residents in ancient towns and villages. First, the income source is instable. On the one hand, the majority of residents in ancient towns and villages maintain their livelihood depending on agriculture, and the agricultural income accounts for more than 70% of the total income of the residents. The climate changes, especially the meteorological disasters, seriously affect the agricultural income of residents. Ecological fragility and frequent occurrence of natural disasters is the greatest hazard to agricultural economic development, and also the cause of poverty in rural areas. On the other hand, the residents working outside, with great mobility and flexibility in work, thus the income from working outside is instable. Second, the consumption of health and education leads to vulnerability in poverty reduction. For the residents in ancient towns and villages, there is a rife phenomenon that minor ailment is disregarded, and serious illness is refractory. Many families are incapable of bearing the health risks. In ancient towns and villages, the children's education expenses make the

residents' family burden onerous. In recent years, some residents in ancient towns and villages are also aware of the importance of education, and they begin to increase investment in their children's education. However, for low-income families, children receiving higher education, has inflicted heavy financial pressure on families, so that families cannot make ends meet.

3 Countermeasures for poverty reduction of ancient towns and villages in Shanxi Province

3.1 Improving the targeting mechanism of poverty in ancient towns and villages

Shanxi Province should formulate unified standard of the poor villages^[3]. After determining the standard of the poor villages, the existing poor ancient towns and villages with great protection value are incorporated into the project of advancing the whole village. Shanxi Province should provide considerable investment to ancient towns and villages, to accelerate the pace of poverty reduction in ancient towns and villages. Shanxi Province can steer the county-level and village-level targeting mechanism to household-level targeting mechanism, determine the poor households as important anti-poverty goals, constantly adjust and improve the poverty alleviation measures according to the effect of poverty alleviation. The key to household-level targeting is to determine the poor households. As for the selection of poor households, we can choose by referring to the participatory index put forward by the Expert Group of the Asian Development Bank, namely, the living status (per capita food yield, per capita annual income, living status in old houses, etc.); production and living conditions (the situation of having electricity and water, the use of motor vehicles, quantity of household appliances); health and education status (prevalence rate of family members, dropout rate in primary and secondary schools). On the basis of determining the poor households, it should offer living allowance and labor skills training, ensure the children in poor families to receive compulsory education, and formulate many other preferential policies to benefit the poor families, to improve the living conditions of poor families, thereby reducing the number of

poor people in ancient villages and towns.

3.2 Speeding up the development of agricultural industrialization in ancient towns and villages In the survey, we find that the development of 90% of ancient towns and villages depends on agriculture, and the vast majority of ancient towns and villages have no competitive industries, therefore optimizing the structure of agricultural production, promoting the industrialization of agriculture, and promoting agricultural labor productivity, is an important way to cast off poverty in ancient towns and villages. In accordance with policy recommendations for industrialization poverty alleviation in *Chinese Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development Program*, we should produce the agricultural products with resources advantages and market demand in ancient towns and villages; according to the direction of industrial development, carry out contiguous planning and construction, to form regional leading industry with characteristics; actively develop made-to-order farming of "companies + farmers"; guide and encourage large and medium-sized processing enterprises of agricultural products capable of expanding new markets, to establish bases in poor ancient towns and villages, and provide services in the whole process of production for poor residents in ancient towns and villages, forming industrialization operation integrating trade, industry and agriculture. It should strengthen the building of wholesale market of agricultural products in poor ancient towns and villages, and further promote the circulation of agricultural products, to form large-scale production. The development of agricultural industrialization in ancient towns and villages requires more organized labor forces to jointly participate in production, breaking the situation of individual farmers predominating in operation, providing employment opportunities to rural surplus labor force, and also opportunities for the migrant workers' development after returning home.

3.3 Advancing internal "urbanization" of ancient towns and villages and new countryside construction It should advance internal "urbanization" of ancient towns and villages, and transfer surplus labor force. The survey shows that the cause of poverty of ancient towns and villages lies in too many rural surplus labor forces. Therefore, if the surplus labor forces in ancient towns and villages can not be successfully transferred out of agriculture, or moved out of rural areas, it is impossible to fundamentally eliminate rural poverty. In order to transfer surplus labor forces out of agriculture, in addition to development of the secondary industry that we formerly attached great importance to, it is more important to develop the tertiary industry^[4]. Ancient towns and villages not only have a wealth of architectural monuments, but also have distinct features of culture. These are the inherent superior resources for the development of the tertiary industry in ancient towns and villages, and to develop the tertiary industry, ancient towns and villages still need to have a large number of service personnel and other software resources. Therefore, the human resources needed by ancient towns and villages for developing the tertiary industry should be resolved by relying on internal "urbanization" of ancient towns and villages; that is, we should develop some

relatively concentrated residential areas within ancient towns and villages, and remove some small-scale villages in ancient towns and villages with no significant conservation value, to achieve the integration of resources. We should advance new countryside construction, carry out orderly population migration in the ancient towns and villages with great population carrying pressure, to promote the sustainable development of ancient villages and towns.

3.4 Strengthening infrastructure building in ancient towns and villages On the one hand, the infrastructure in ancient towns and villages should focus on water, electricity, roads, gas and houses. The government should allocate special funds, to continue to address the issues concerning safe water drinking of rural residents in ancient towns and villages; implement transformation and upgrading of the power grids in ancient towns and villages, to enhance power supply reliability and power supply capacity in rural areas; speed up road construction in ancient towns and villages; expand the scale of biogas construction in ancient towns and villages, advance the construction of large and medium-sized biogas project and centralized gas supply project, promote clean fuels in rural areas; increase efforts in renovation project of dilapidated buildings and old houses in ancient villages, expand the scale of renovation. On the other hand, the emphasis should be laid on irrigation and water conservancy, improve the conditions of irrigation. We should advance water-saving transformation in large and medium-sized irrigation districts, speed up the construction of end-canal system; promote the construction of small-scale irrigation and water conservancy, establish a batch of new key counties of small-scale irrigation and water conservancy construction; comprehensively use engineering, agronomy, management and other measures, to develop water-saving irrigation agriculture, and encourage the places with certain conditions to promote drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation and other water-saving technologies; promote soil testing and directive fertilization; enhance the subsidizing scale and scope; promote protective farming technology and implement dry farming demonstration project, to improve and enhance the quality of cultivated land.

3.5 Providing fair and efficient allocation of resources and reducing regional differences There are enormous differences in fund-raising ability of local government between regions, and the financial transfers of government at a higher level can only solve part of the problem. Huge imbalance in financial resources between local jurisdictions translates into huge differences in the levels of public spending, which leads to a huge difference in the quality and level of public service supply, the degree of social security, and poverty alleviation pace, then causing continuation and expansion of inequality. There is a phenomenon of imbalance in regional development in Shanxi's ancient towns and villages. Only by the implementation of broader poverty alleviation programs to provide fairer and more adequate allocation of resources for local governments, can we ensure that all levels of government in the province with

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resources, to provide services and social security meeting the basic level and quality stipulated by the state, for residents. The government can make use of the means of transfer payments to bridge the gap between rich regions and backward regions, to encourage the regions with high level of economic development to driving the economic development in backward regions, and promote balanced regional economic development.

3.6 Promoting the ability of residents in ancient towns and villages to cope with poverty reduction vulnerability

From the perspective of assets, ancient towns and villages residents can use tangible assets and intangible assets to confront poverty vulnerability, and assets can help reduce the number of hazards. Ancient towns and villages not only have different types of construction, inscribed tablet and record of events inscribed on a tablet, famous wood and ancient trees, and other types of material cultural heritage, but also have different types of local rules and regulations valid for all the inhabitants of a township, folk custom, traditional festival, folk belief, traditional craft and other types of non-material cultural heritage. All these are assets possessed by the ancient towns and villages. From the perspective of funds, ancient towns and villages should raise funds through various channels, formulate all-around agricultural financial pro-poor policies, adjust the fund use structure, strengthen fund management, im-

prove fund use efficiency, implement the mechanism innovation, create the conditions for market capital entering into the area of poverty reduction, and promote the combination of the government's social objectives and enterprise's economic objectives, to achieve effective unification of social and economic benefits^[5]. From point of view of education, we should develop education in ancient towns and villages, increase the stock of human capital in ancient towns and villages, and especially enhance investment in basic education in the Luliang area and the northern Shanxi frontier areas with economic backwardness. Promoting the quality of residents in ancient towns and villages is an important way to deal with vulnerability in poverty reduction.

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