

China's Campaign to Build a New Socialist Countryside: Village Modernization, Peasant Councils, and the Ganzhou Model of Rural Development*

Kristen E. Looney[†]

Abstract

Since the mid-2000s, the Chinese government has promoted village modernization under the banner of “building a new socialist countryside.” To explain the origins and outcomes of this policy, this article examines the case of Ganzhou city in Jiangxi province. Ganzhou became a national model for rural development known for involving organizations called peasant councils in policy implementation. The study found that despite an initial emphasis on rural participation and moderate change, the new socialist countryside evolved into a top-down campaign to demolish and reconstruct villages. Three factors shaped this process: the strength of bureaucratic mobilization, the weakness of rural organizations, and shifting national policy priorities. After obtaining model status, Ganzhou's rural policy became more ambitious and politicized, leaving little space for participation. This insight suggests there are both benefits and costs to China's policy process. Despite the advantages of policy innovation, scaling up local experiments may actually undermine their success.

Keywords: building a new socialist countryside; China; rural development; rural housing; political participation; policy implementation

Against the backdrop of China's urbanization, recent accounts of rural change emphasize the rapid disappearance of villages and the growing number of landless peasants.¹ While these trends are important to note, this article highlights an equally dramatic yet understudied aspect of rural change – village modernization. After the “building a new socialist countryside” (*jianshe shehuizhuyi xin nongcun*

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[†] Georgetown University, Washington, DC. Email: kl705@georgetown.edu.

¹ Sargeson 2013.

建设社会主义新农村) policy was introduced in 2005, most observers stressed its economic and social goals.² Over time, however, the goal of “tidying up the villages” became the priority of many local “new socialist countryside” (NSC) initiatives. In particular, village renovation (*cunzhuang zhengzhi* 村庄整治) was widely promoted under Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 to improve rural infrastructure, sanitation and housing. The new Xi Jinping 习近平 government’s urbanization drive redirected these efforts towards larger villages and townships, but it did not eclipse them, as evidenced by a national village renovation conference held in October 2013.³

Previous studies of the NSC have focused on the state’s capacity and tools for policy implementation. For example, Elizabeth Perry argues that the NSC should be understood as a “managed campaign” because it powerfully combines technocratic pragmatism with Mao-era campaign tactics such as work teams.⁴ Similarly, Anna Ahlers and Gunter Schubert show that local modelling, standardized evaluations and other practices are effective tools of policy implementation.⁵ Very little, however, has been written about the process of village modernization during the NSC and its impact on villagers, both in terms of their participation and policy outcomes. Within the literature on rural participation in China, scholarship on cooperatives, elderly associations and lineage groups reflects a long research tradition linking positive development outcomes with rural organizational strength.⁶ Yet, most studies of rural organizations in the reform era are concerned with routine governance and development and not large-scale campaigns like the NSC.

To address these issues, this article examines a single significant case and traces the evolution of village modernization programmes over a ten-year period, 2004–2013. Ganzhou 赣州, a prefectural city in southern Jiangxi province, was the first place in China to initiate a policy under the banner of building a new socialist countryside in September 2004, one year before the central government unveiled its programme. The city’s Party secretary, Pan Yiyang 潘逸阳, articulated what became known as the “Ganzhou model.”⁷ Promoted nationally since 2005, this model emphasizes village renovation and the involvement of organizations called peasant councils (*nongmin lishihui* 农民理事会) in policy implementation.⁸

2 See, e.g., McGregor 2006; Saich 2007.

3 *Renmin ribao*. 2013. “Xi Jinping jiu gaishan nongcun renju huanjing zuochu zhongyao zhishi, Li Keqiang jiu tuijin zhe xiang gongzuo zuochu pishi” (Xi Jinping gives important instructions on improving the rural living environment, Li Keqiang comments on advancing this work), 20 October.

4 Perry 2011.

5 Ahlers and Schubert 2013.

6 For recent work, see Bislev and Thøgersen 2012. For a classic study, see Uphoff and Esman 1974.

7 The centre’s promotion of Ganzhou as a success story to validate national policy differs from the Dazhai-style model emulation of the Mao era which entailed central pressure to follow a specific prototype. The centre endorsed Ganzhou as a *moshi* while also stressing that NSC plans should reflect local conditions.

8 I translate *nongmin lishihui* (sometimes called *cunmin lishihui* or *xin nongcun jianshe lishihui*) as peasant council to distinguish it from the village committee and farmers’ cooperatives. Ahlers and Schubert 2013 use the term village administration council.

Ganzhou is therefore a crucial case for understanding the NSC's origins and outcomes, and for assessing villagers' potential to influence policy under seemingly favourable conditions.

The study found that despite an initial emphasis on rural participation and moderate change, the NSC evolved into a top-down campaign to demolish and reconstruct villages. I argue that three factors shaped this process: the strength of bureaucratic mobilization, the weakness of rural organizations, and shifting national policy priorities. Simply stated, after the Ganzhou model was scaled up, the policy became more ambitious in its goals and politicized in its implementation, leaving little space for participation. To borrow Merilee Grindle's terminology, changes in policy content and context resulted in different outcomes to those originally intended, outcomes that can at best be described as mixed.⁹

These findings suggest there are both benefits and costs to China's policy process. According to Sebastian Heilmann, the main benefit is an experimental, pragmatic approach to policymaking that, unlike the former Soviet Union's commandism, facilitates innovation and contributes to China's authoritarian resilience.¹⁰ The case of Ganzhou illustrates how local governments can be policy innovators, but it also suggests that once local experiments are integrated into a broader national agenda they become more centralized and less flexible. Christian Göbel observed this tendency in his 2010 study of rural tax reform, noting that, after a period of experimentation, the centre sets an agenda and uses its hierarchical power to enforce compliance when resistance emerges.¹¹ Yet, the changes that occurred in Ganzhou had more to do with excessive support for the policy than resistance. A useful way of thinking about this case theoretically comes from Stephen Quick's description of an ideological policy caught up in a "paradox of popularity." Features of ideological policies include numerous and ambiguous goals, high expectations, a heavy commitment of resources, politicized leadership, immunity from public criticism, and political popularity, which "inhibits the feedback process and reduces the capacity of the implementing agency to respond creatively to problems."¹² As Ganzhou's NSC was endorsed by higher levels of government, it started resembling an ideological policy, or stated differently, a grand development project. The drawback, therefore, of scaling up local experiments is that they are transformed into grand development projects, which can undermine their success.

This research draws on original fieldwork and numerous Chinese sources, including government documents, yearbooks, news reports and academic articles. During the summer months of 2010 and 2013, I conducted over 100 interviews with Ganzhou officials, peasant councillors and villagers. I visited 38 villages and spent several days living in three of them. Most villages had finished or

9 Grindle 1980.

10 Heilmann 2008.

11 Göbel 2010.

12 Quick 1980, 58.

were undergoing renovation, but six had not yet implemented the NSC. The officials I encountered were generally confident about their work and allowed me to select field sites and conduct many interviews unsupervised. The article begins with an overview of the Hu-era rural reforms, followed by a discussion of the significance of village modernization during the NSC. It proceeds with a description of Ganzhou's rise to national model status, and then examines the implementation and outcomes of the policy in detail. The final section presents observations about the NSC's evolution to the present.

Rural Reform under Hu Jintao

In 2004, the central government released a “number one document” (*yihao wenjian* 一号文件) concerning agriculture – the first since 1986. Outlining the year's most important policy goals, it stated that China had entered a new period in which “industry should nurture agriculture, and cities should support the countryside.” Since 2004, every consecutive number one document has pertained to agriculture. Chen Xiwen 陈锡文, director of the Central Leading Group on Rural Work, observes that, like de-collectivization and other Deng reforms of the 1980s, Hu Jintao's ascendancy ushered in a “second golden age of rural reform.”¹³

The prioritization of rural reform arose from growing unrest in the late 1990s and early 2000s. After the 1994 fiscal reforms, which greatly reduced local tax revenues, township and village governments became dependent on extra-budgetary fees. Excessive fee collection resulted in heavy “peasant burdens” and widespread protest.¹⁴ The centre responded with rural tax-for-fee reform (RTFR), which culminated in the total elimination of agricultural taxes in 2006.¹⁵ Although some studies highlight the negative effects of RTFR on local state autonomy,¹⁶ Chinese sources often herald it as the end of 2,600 years of “imperial grain taxes” and the beginning of a new era of rural development.

The 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–2010) further overhauled rural policy and identified the NSC as the nation's top domestic priority. Its official slogan outlined broad goals: “develop production, enrich livelihood, civilize rural habits, tidy up the villages, and democratize management.”¹⁷ The 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015), while focused more on urbanization, reaffirmed central commitment to the NSC. Through inter-governmental fiscal transfers, the NSC directed unprecedented investments to the countryside and, despite some problems such as local government diversions of funds and a pro-rich bias in subsidy distribution, existing research confirms that transfers have reached China's villages.¹⁸

13 Sun 2008, 42.

14 Bernstein and Lü 2003.

15 Göbel 2010.

16 Kennedy 2007.

17 Translation from Perry 2011, 39.

18 Liu, Mingxing, et al. 2009; Lin, Wanlong, and Wong 2012.

This policy shift in the 2000s has been attributed to Hu's background working in Guizhou and Tibet, which made him more sensitive to rural issues than his predecessor Jiang Zemin 江泽民.¹⁹ Yet, it would be a mistake to ascribe the NSC entirely to Hu and the central government. This study confirms the view that local governments wield influence over policymaking. They face constraints, such as the macro-policy environment and conditions attached to transfers, but they are also powerful, especially during the early stages of the policy process. Before delving into the case, it is worth considering the meaning of village modernization in China.

Understanding Village Modernization

Village modernization can be defined as a deliberate effort to improve village public infrastructure, sanitation and housing. Among these three dimensions, housing has been most important during the NSC. This section brings together multiple perspectives to explain the complex logic underpinning the NSC's focus on village modernization in general and rural housing in particular.

First, government regulation of the rural built environment stems from the mandate to protect arable land. This resource declined in the reform era owing to the "rural house building craze" and the dynamics of urbanization, namely the "development zone fever" of the 1990s and construction of "new cities" in the 2000s.²⁰ Throughout the NSC, villagers have been pressured to demolish abandoned housing so that "wasted" and "idle" land resources can be freed up for new construction or farming. Second, village modernization is considered important for stimulating domestic demand, which has been a government priority since the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis elevated concerns about China's export dependence. Former World Bank chief economist, Justin Lin, has repeatedly advocated this position, calling for investment in rural "consumption-related infrastructure." Still, he remains cautious about efforts to demolish housing: "Especially when land prices are surging, some people are tempted to destroy villages to seize land under the pretext of building a new socialist countryside."²¹

As Lin suggests, a third reason for the NSC's focus on housing is revenue-driven land expropriation. Many studies show that local governments exhibit predatory behaviour with regards to land use and rely on "land-centred accumulation" as their main revenue source.²² Consequently, villagers have been encouraged or forced to build "modern" multi-storey homes occupying less land than traditional homes, thereby releasing land for other uses and creating new rent-seeking opportunities for officials.²³ Fourth, village modernization resembles what James Scott calls a "high-modernist" development project, in which

19 Donaldson 2011, 168–69.

20 Sargeson 2002; Hsing 2010.

21 Lin, Justin Yifu 2012, 239–240.

22 Phrase taken from Hsing 2010.

23 Ong 2014.

a “rational design of social order” is imposed on society with detrimental effect.²⁴ Indeed, the government has embraced village planning as a solution to rural backwardness and has borrowed heavily from urban models of residential life, the appropriateness of which is debatable. Village planning accelerated after the Urban and Rural Planning Law took effect in 2008, requiring that plans for cities, counties, townships and villages be coordinated and implemented hierarchically.²⁵ Similarly, “new rural community construction” has facilitated the concentration of housing and services in carefully planned “central villages.”²⁶

Fifth, local governments have promoted NSC housing programmes to cultivate political loyalty. Examining the Tibetan case, Emily Yeh develops the concept of “indebtedness engineering,” a process whereby villagers accept subsidies and loan forgiveness as a “gift” from the state in return for their “performance of loyalty.”²⁷ Although Yeh asserts that Tibet’s experience is unique, as explained later, this concept can be applied more broadly. Finally, village modernization is partly driven by popular demand, especially among families hoping to improve their children’s marriage prospects with a new home. In some cases, villagers initiate these programmes to capture government development funds or, like rent-seeking officials, to capitalize on the exchange value of their land.²⁸ Furthermore, the integration of village renovation with other policies, such as dilapidated housing renovation and poverty alleviation resettlement, has led to sweeping changes in the remote countryside and not just along the urban fringes, and has produced satisfaction among the rural population in some places.²⁹

These different interpretations suggest that village modernization in China has largely been shaped by the politics of rural housing. This is an area where various interests (central, local, village) both converge and compete, and is increasingly important in government narratives of modernization. In the NSC’s early years, arable land protection and the stimulation of domestic demand through basic infrastructure investment were important national policy goals. In later years, especially after the Third Plenum of the 17th Party Congress in 2008, the macro-policy environment noticeably changed such that housing, land transfers and urbanization became more important. Local governments incorporated these objectives into village planning because of central pressure, potential land revenue and awareness that housing programmes could generate popular support, if not political loyalty. This shift in national policy priorities is reflected in Ganzhou in particular because of its model status. Whereas some localities may ignore central directives that are impractical or inconsistent with local interests, no such option exists for a model that wishes to maintain its political standing.

24 Scott 1998.

25 Bray 2013.

26 Rosenberg 2013.

27 Yeh 2013, 231–263.

28 Li, Lixing 2012.

29 Xue, Wang and Xue 2013.

The Ganzhou Model

Located in southern Jiangxi, Ganzhou borders the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong and Hunan. It is China's largest prefectural city in terms of administrative area, covering 18 counties and county-level cities. Ganzhou occupies 39,400 square kilometres, roughly one-fourth of Jiangxi, and is similar in size to Taiwan. Its population is about 9.18 million, of which more than 7 million live in rural areas. Over 95 per cent of the population is Hakka, a subgroup of Han Chinese who migrated from the north and developed a distinctive language and culture. Because of its mountainous topography, Ganzhou's infrastructure and industrial development lags behind other places. Its economy relies on agriculture, especially citrus farming, and the mining of rare earth metals. Despite its Hakka identity and specialized economic sectors, Ganzhou is often described as a typical underdeveloped region. Tables 1 and 2 provide some descriptive statistics about the city and counties where fieldwork was conducted.

In September 2004, Ganzhou announced its plan to build a new socialist countryside, envisioning "new townships and villages, new rural commodities, new economic organizations, new peasants, new culture, and good government leadership." The plan identified developing "new townships and villages" as a top priority, since this would produce tangible, immediate results. A mechanism called "three clean-ups, three changes" (*san qing san gai* 三清三改) would serve as a "breakthrough point" for village renovation. The "three clean-ups" were defined as removing trash, mud and road debris, and the "three changes" as improving the water supply, toilets and roads.³⁰ This heavy emphasis on the village environment became a defining characteristic of the Ganzhou model.

The early adoption of this policy can be attributed to Pan Yiyang, the Party secretary from 2003 to 2010. During the NSC, Pan was not only Ganzhou's most powerful leader but also an influential figure in provincial politics. He served as director of Jiangxi's Rural Work Department (2001–2003) and belonged to the Jiangxi Party standing committee (2001–2010), an elite group of 13 officials. Pan received his PhD in Marxist philosophy from Sun Yat-sen University in 2001, and published a book about rural development, *A Peasant-centred Theory*, in 2002.³¹ His appointment as Party secretary presented an opportunity to test his ideas about "peasants as the main actors" (*nongmin zhuti* 农民主体).³² Pan described the Ganzhou model in articles appearing in the *People's Daily* and *Qiushi* in 2005.³³ In the latter publication, he advocated the nationwide establishment of peasant councils and summarized Ganzhou's development strategy as "the government leads, peasants are the main actors,

30 Ganzhou City Government 2004.

31 Pan 2002.

32 Interview with Pan Yiyang, Ganzhou city, 23 June 2010.

33 Pan, Yiyang. 2005. "Jiakuai tuijin xin nongcun jianshe" (Accelerate new rural construction), *Renmin ribao*, 8 June; "Zhazha shishi di jianshe shehuizhuyi xin nongcun – xuexi shiliu jie wuzhong quanhai jingshen de tihui" (Solidly build a new socialist countryside – understanding the spirit of the 16th Party congress 5th plenary session), *Qiushi* 24, 8–10.

Table 1: **Ganzhou City Statistics, 2003 and 2011**

Indicator	2003	2011	Ganzhou as percentage of Jiangxi in 2011
Administrative units	Counties: 18 Townships: 283 Villages: 3,467 Teams: 48,798	Counties: 18 Townships: 283 Villages: 3,460 Teams: 48,928	22.5% (counties)
Land resources (km ²)	Total: 39,400 Farmland: 2,957	Total: 39,400 Farmland: 4,375	23.6% (total)
Population (million persons)	Total: 8.3 Rural: 6.71 Urban: 1.59	Total: 9.18 Rural: 7.29 Urban: 1.89	20.46% (total)
Out-migration (million persons)	1.14	1.5	
Per capita income (yuan)	Rural: 2,240 Urban: 6,723	Rural: 4,684 Urban: 16,058	67.96% (rural) 91.79% (urban)
GDP (billion yuan)	36.65	133.6	11.42%
GDP by sector	Agriculture: 29.4% Industry: 32.1% Services: 38.5%	Agriculture: 17.4% Industry: 47.2% Services: 35.4%	
Grain production (million tons)	1.99	2.79	13.57%
Fruit production (million tons)	0.3456 (39% oranges)	1.76 (76% oranges)	45.44%
Government revenue (billion yuan)	3.14	18.03	10.96%
Government expenditures (billion yuan)	4.75	31.17	12.3%

Sources:

Compiled from various sections of Hu 2009; Leng 2012; Peng 2012.

Notes:

2003 is the year prior to Ganzhou's NSC. 2011 is the most recent year with available comparable data. Counties include one district and two county-level cities. Villages are units with village committees. Teams are natural villages below the village committee. Out-migration counts residents working outside Ganzhou but not necessarily outside Jiangxi. The revenue–expenditures gap reflects the inclusion of fiscal transfers in expenditures.

cadres serve, and the whole society participates.” Zeng Qinghong 曾庆红, a close ally of Jiang Zemin and former vice-president under Hu Jintao, hailed this slogan as an effective “work mechanism” and recognized Ganzhou as the first place to experiment with the NSC as a solution to China’s “three rural problems” (i.e. peasants, villages and agriculture).³⁴

In July and August 2005, the minister of construction, Wang Guangdao 汪光焘, and Zheng Xinli 郑新立 from the Central Policy Research Office separately visited Ganzhou to inspect its progress. They were deeply impressed by the results. In the NSC’s first year (2004–2005), the city renovated 4,025 villages,

34 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 72.

Table 2: Statistics for Five Counties in Ganzhou, 2011

County	Rural population (persons)	Rural per capita income (yuan)	GDP (billion yuan)	Government revenue (million yuan)
Anyuan 安远	310,096	3,698	3.52	330.98
Longnan 龙南	166,700	5,185	7.52	910.03
Ruijin 瑞金	541,298	4,576	7.68	810.06
Shicheng 石城	263,800	3,132	2.73	300.05
Xingguo 兴国	668,166	3,961	8.97	760.85

Source:

Compiled from various sections of Leng 2012.

Notes:

Ruijin is a county-level city. Anyuan and Xingguo are national poverty counties, making them eligible for special earmarked funds.

which entailed providing clean water to over 74,000 people, installing 670,000 flush toilets and paving 3,240 kilometres of roads. The city also demolished over three million square metres of abandoned housing, and reportedly nobody protested or petitioned the government. Moreover, the city spent only 76 million yuan, about 40 per cent of the cost, with the villagers covering the difference. After visiting, Wang received Premier Wen Jiabao's 温家宝 approval to hold a national village renovation conference in Ganzhou in November 2005.³⁵

At the conference, Wang stressed village renovation's significance to the NSC, stating it would address peasants' "most urgent, direct and important concerns" and narrow the gap between China's modern cities and its "dirty, disorganized and poor" countryside. Wang warned, however, that village renovation did not mean the demolition of old villages and construction of new villages, or the relocation of villagers into centralized housing. He praised several local experiments but singled out Ganzhou's approach. In contrast with the southern Jiangsu model of developing collectively owned firms, or the Wenzhou 温州 model of embracing private enterprise, the Ganzhou model of government-led initiatives to improve the village environment was described as appropriate for places with weak collective assets and limited urban markets. Additionally, peasant councils were praised for making renovation programmes "transparent, democratic and responsive to peasant interests."³⁶

With central endorsement, Ganzhou received substantial media attention and became a training site for officials. Using China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) databases, it appears that 21 provinces published articles on the Ganzhou model, and 23 provinces published articles on peasant councils.³⁷ Approximately 500 official delegations, representing 20 central

35 Fang and Liu 2006, 56, 178–180; Li, Zuojun 2008, 135–36.

36 Fang and Liu 2006, 176–78; Li, Zuojun 2008, 130.

37 A list of localities with publications on the Ganzhou model and peasant councils (2004–2013) is on file with the author. Place names were collected from the publishers. I define local publications as newspapers, magazines, academic journals, local Party school journals, or conference proceedings that are clearly linked to a provincial or sub-provincial unit and are either owned by the local government or by an institution presumed to have limited influence beyond that unit. National statistics on councils

agencies and all provinces, visited Ganzhou to study the NSC. According to Jiangxi's Rural Work Department, Hunan sent the most delegations, 23 in total, and Yongzhou 永州 city fully replicated the Ganzhou model. "Three clean-ups, three changes" inspired similar policies in Heilongjiang, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Guangxi and Sichuan; and Ganzhou's policy coordination institutions (discussed below) were replicated in Shanxi and "several other provinces and cities."³⁸

The interaction of central and city officials leading up to Beijing's adoption of the NSC shows that Ganzhou influenced national policy, exemplifying what Heilmann calls "experimentation under hierarchy."³⁹ According to a *People's Daily* reporter, Pan Yiyang likely had privileged access to central leaders through the communist youth league (CYL), allowing him to anticipate policy and take action to make Ganzhou a model.⁴⁰ However, this theory is difficult to confirm given the sensitivity surrounding factional politics in China. More often, local officials cite Ganzhou's history of rural policy experimentation to explain its frontrunner status during the NSC: Ganzhou is where the communists first experimented with land reform and other policies during the Jiangxi Soviet period (1928–1934) and where the Kuomintang conducted the "new life" movement (1934–1938), one of the goals of which was to improve rural sanitation.⁴¹ While the mechanisms behind policy innovation are hard to pinpoint, it is evident that Ganzhou provided a particular template for national policy: Pan may have been politically ambitious, but he was also committed to peasant-driven change and believed that the government should merely play a supporting role to peasant councils. Moreover, the change envisioned was relatively moderate. In its original formulation, the NSC focused on improving sanitation and existing infrastructure and not on building new housing. Although Ganzhou became a model for these reasons, the NSC changed during the course of implementation.

Policy Implementation

In China's political context, grand development projects exhibit a campaign logic whereby the entire bureaucracy mobilizes to produce visible progress within a short period. This observation holds for both the Mao and reform eras, as work on birth planning and other policies has shown.⁴² This section discusses

footnote continued

are unavailable, but existing Chinese research suggests that councils are commonly found in Anhui, Hubei and Jiangxi. See Chen, Chen and Liu 2012.

38 Liu, Moyan 2006, 165–66.

39 Heilmann 2008, 29.

40 Interview with *People's Daily* reporter, Nanchang, 7 June 2010. In 1995, Pan became Party secretary of Guangdong's provincial CYL and a member of the Central CYL Standing Committee. See Li, Yun, and Ling 2006, 509–510.

41 Kim 1973; Ferlanti 2010.

42 White 2006. For more on the NSC's campaign features, see Perry 2011.

Ganzhou's bureaucratic and popular mobilization during the NSC. While previous research correctly describes Ganzhou's NSC as more participatory than other places,⁴³ the following analysis provides new details on the composition and activities of peasant councils that suggest their power vis-à-vis the state is limited. For grand development projects, the pressure to deliver results drives local officials to exert maximum control over the policy process. In the context of a campaign, participation may be allowed or even encouraged, but is almost always controlled. This dynamic is reinforced by the weak position of many rural organizations, which often serve as instruments of the state rather than as representatives of the village.

Bureaucratic mobilization

To coordinate policy implementation, Ganzhou consolidated the rural programmes of 14 departments into two umbrella organizations at the city and county levels – the Rural Work Department (RWD) and the New Socialist Countryside Leading Group. Since the NSC Leading Group meets only occasionally to discuss development plans, the RWD oversees daily implementation tasks. To ensure agenda-setting power, the Party secretary heads the NSC Leading Group and a Party standing committee member directs the RWD, meaning these groups are not controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture or another unit on the administrative side of government. Heralded as the “locomotive power” behind the NSC, this organizational structure is uniform throughout Jiangxi and has been adopted by other provinces.⁴⁴

The RWD successfully rallied every government agency to support the NSC. Top officials “link with sites” (*gua dian* 挂点), helping to plan, fund, implement and monitor projects. This practice extends from the provincial Party standing committee down to township Party secretaries and executives.⁴⁵ Rank-and-file cadres do not link, but rather “grab” or “squat” on sites (*zhua dian* 抓点, *dun dian* 蹲点). The distinction between linking and grabbing is one of degree. Whereas top officials visit NSC sites intermittently, rank-and-file cadres are expected to visit daily during renovation. For every site, the RWD assigns a sponsoring department to finance public infrastructure and a work team to oversee implementation. Between 2004 and 2008, over 9,000 work teams, or approximately 39,000 officials, were sent to the villages.⁴⁶

The strength of Ganzhou's bureaucratic mobilization derives from perceived promotion opportunities and cadre evaluation reforms. To become an official NSC site, 85 per cent of villagers must sign an application submitted to the township. For cadres seeking promotion, however, the goal is 100 per cent

43 Thøgersen 2009; Ahlers and Schubert 2013.

44 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 60; Liu, Moyan 2006, 165–66.

45 Interview with *People's Daily* reporter, Nanchang, 7 June 2010.

46 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 63.

participation, which means contacting migrant workers and engaging in “thought work” (i.e. verbal pressure tactics) with resistant villagers.⁴⁷ Completing renovation quickly is equally important. According to one official, “Grabbing a site effectively means accomplishing renovation within six months to a year. Whoever finishes first gets promoted.”⁴⁸ The city also incorporated NSC work into cadre evaluations more generally, meaning all departments face pressure to contribute to the policy. This system assigns points to component parts of NSC programmes and is uniform throughout Ganzhou, facilitating the comparison and ranking of cadres. Meeting evaluation standards may not result in promotion but failure can lead to warning, probation or transfer to a less desirable position.⁴⁹

Popular mobilization

While bureaucratic mobilization is common to both Mao- and reform-era campaigns, popular mobilization is less typical today. Given China’s record of rural contention, however, Pan Yiyang and other leaders believed an overly top-down approach to renovation could trigger conflict. They accordingly employed three instruments to popularize the NSC: publicity, subsidies and peasant councils. Between 2004 and 2009, the government distributed over 200,000 propaganda posters and 280,000 books about the NSC. The RWD invested about 10 million yuan in a website, television channel and magazine called *New Peasant Weekly*. It also backed the production of China’s first film on the NSC, *Gannan Love Story*.⁵⁰ During fieldwork, I even encountered a travelling Hakka-language troupe hired by the government to perform musical skits about the NSC.⁵¹

More effectively than propaganda, government investment and subsidies have helped generate popular support. The RWD estimates each site receives 430,000 yuan from government sources for renovation, but in practice it varies significantly.⁵² The total invested depends on the county budget, the sponsoring department’s budget, private donations and villagers’ income. Other factors include the village’s designation as a regular or showpiece site (*yiban jianshe dian* 一般建设点, *jingpin shifan dian* 精品示范点), and its access to specially earmarked funds. Villages can become county, city or provincial sites. About half of selected villages obtain provincial status (*shengfu dian* 省扶点), meaning the province provides a baseline of 160,000 yuan to be used within one year.⁵³ This investment, combined with other sources, is distributed as public infrastructure grants and

47 Interview with work team cadre, Longnan, 5 July 2010.

48 Interview with work team cadre, Xingguo, 25 June 2010.

49 Ganzhou NSC Leading Group 2010; interview with Party organization department official, Ganzhou, 19 June 2010.

50 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 35, 42, 47, 71–72.

51 Site visit, Xingguo, 21 June 2010.

52 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 75.

53 This amount was fixed for 2009–2012. During fieldwork in 2013, Jiangxi announced a record increase to 300,000 yuan per site.

household subsidies. Each county sets annual subsidy standards and displays them in villages. Anyuan 安远 officials estimate that, on average, households receive 10,000 yuan.⁵⁴ To attract government attention, some villages initiate renovation before being selected by proactively cleaning the village and demolishing old homes. Known as “autonomous sites” (*zizhu dian* 自主点), these villages compete for NSC status and funding. In Shicheng 石城, about 40 per cent of official sites were autonomous sites first.⁵⁵

Despite unprecedented outside investment, the cost of renovation is high for villagers. The city estimates that between 2004 and 2011, overall investment in renovation was 9.44 billion yuan, of which 4.22 billion yuan (45 per cent) came from peasants. Not only must 85 per cent of residents sign the village's NSC application but some counties also require households to sign renovation contracts agreeing to cover 60–70 per cent of the cost. When asked about renovation expenses, most villagers responded vaguely with “a few thousand yuan,” and some expressed wariness about the burden posed by the NSC. To mitigate potential resistance, the city has relied on peasant councils. By the end of 2012, there were 21,482 councils in Ganzhou, one for each site.⁵⁶

The year before a village applies for NSC status, the government recruits potential council members who spend months preparing renovation contracts. Once the necessary support is obtained, the government organizes a “mass mobilization meeting” to elect 5–15 councillors and finalize the application for the township. Most villagers asserted they elected those councillors possessing “prestige” (*weiwang* 威望) and a sense of “justice” (*gongdao* 公道) to ensure any disputes would be handled impartially.⁵⁷ Councils are generally comprised of the “five elderly groups” (i.e. retired Party members, officials, teachers, soldiers and model labourers) and younger “activists” seen as “capable of enriching the farmers.” Unlike village officials, who cannot be elected, councillors are unpaid volunteers.

Peasant councils are often compared with traditional rural organizations, and previous research suggests that the prominence of lineages, a feature of Hakka social structure, laid the foundation for Ganzhou's councils.⁵⁸ The government insists, however, that councils are not clan-based, and in fact councils have overseen the demolition or conversion of lineage temples into community centres for “scientific development.”⁵⁹ During my site visits to seven converted temples, councillors stated that the centres were intended for study and training but

54 Interviews revealed that the delivery of subsidies was sometimes slow but confirmed this amount was correct. Interviews with RWD officials, Anyuan, 6 July 2010; villagers, Anyuan, 13 July 2010. Subsidies cover cement for roads, doorsteps and eaves; paint or tiles for outer walls; installation of sewers, drains, water taps and toilets; livestock pens; solar panels; biogas digesters; computers and broadband internet. The standards for 2010 are on file with the author.

55 Shicheng NSC Leading Group 2009, 2, 5.

56 RWD statistical data for 2004–2012 is on file with the author.

57 Interviews with villagers, Xingguo, 27 June 2010, and Ruijin, 7 July 2010.

58 Thøgersen 2009, 10–12.

59 Ganzhou NSC Leading Group 2005, 14, 34.

Figure 1: **Post-NSC Village Structure in Ganzhou***Notes:*

Figure created by the author. The number of communities and teams depends on village size.

could still be used for cultural rituals.⁶⁰ On this issue, a few villagers shared favourable opinions, but most hesitated to say anything besides “we can accept it,” suggesting villagers feared expressing their views (even without officials present). These observations indicate that relations between councils and lineages are often riddled with tension. Councils are different in that most members belong to the Party. Like Mao-era production teams, they are expected to work on the government’s behalf, mobilizing villagers for policy implementation. One councillor explained: “The village government has few people and is weak, so the Rural Work Department linked up with the team leaders. Like in the past, we have been asked to mobilize the masses.”⁶¹

Most officials I interviewed espoused the importance of rural participation, provided it would not hinder policy implementation. They recognized peasant councils as representatives of the village, yet ultimately regarded them as instruments for strengthening state power. In many developing countries, institutional and attitudinal barriers inhibit participation in the policy process. Interest aggregation structures tend to be weak, and political elites view mass participation as illegitimate and inefficient.⁶² Pan Yiyang’s writings suggest that he promoted councils to address these exact problems. However, in practice, their autonomy and power is limited. For example, during the NSC’s early years, councils were

60 Most centres have a meeting space and library. I witnessed a funeral at one centre on a site visit to Ruijin, 18 July 2010.

61 Interview with peasant councillor, Xingguo, 27 June 2010.

62 Grindle 1980, 16–17.

involved in village planning but later this function was outsourced to professional planners and architects. Chinese survey research further shows that councils are respected but considered subordinate to the government and possess little decision-making power.⁶³ Their potential to become stronger is also undermined by the perception that there is little work for them to do after renovation.

Despite these limitations, peasant councils have been critically important in policy implementation. Their main activities are preparing NSC applications and performing tasks that would be problematic for village governments, namely collecting money and persuading villagers to raze their old homes. One official explained: "We cannot use 'one issue, one discussion'⁶⁴ because the centre set a 15 yuan per person limit, which is not nearly enough for renovation. We need the councils to collect money, especially since peasants distrust the village government and will not give them anything."⁶⁵

Villagers' distrust of government dates back to the pre-RTFR period of excessive fee collection. Thus, when the NSC was first introduced, councils were asked to collect about 100 yuan per person to supplement government infrastructure investment, an amount most villagers considered reasonable. Later, however, councils started collecting several thousand yuan per household as a security deposit (*yajin* 押金) for renovation.

The money collected by councils gives them leverage to perform what the government defines as their most important job – guaranteeing that renovations follow the village plan.⁶⁶ Councils must prepare renovation contracts in accordance with the plan's designated areas for demolition and construction, which means reconfiguring the distribution of housing plots. This task is difficult because villagers have different sized plots, depending on provincial standards at the time of allocation. Owing to China's declining land resources, older couples ordinarily have larger plots than recently married couples. NSC plans, however, require that housing plots be equally sized at around 100 square metres. The council sells plots to villagers seeking to build homes, usually for 150 yuan per square metre, then uses that money to compensate families for the demolition of old housing and for plot reductions. Compensation amounts and renovation deadlines are written into the contracts, which both council leaders and affected households must sign. Further complicating matters, within a single house several households (siblings or different generations) may have property claims to different rooms. Like work teams, councils try to minimize resistance through "thought work," such as warning villagers that non-cooperation will disqualify them from future subsidies. NSC applications are sometimes delayed by

63 According to a 2006 survey of 316 households across Jiangxi, when asked who directed the NSC, 73.5% said the village government, 12.3% said the township, 12.3% said nobody, and 1.9% said peasant councils. See Wen and Chen 2007, 6–9.

64 "One issue, one discussion" (*yishi yiyi*) is a policy for financing public goods, whereby villagers make donations and spending decisions on a case-by-case basis.

65 Interview with township official, Xingguo, 19 June 2010.

66 Ganzhou NSC Leading Group 2005, 11–12.

unresolved differences over land and housing, but once enough contracts are signed, implementation occurs quickly. After a village is selected, demolition of old homes takes only a few days, and construction of new homes takes just four to six months.⁶⁷

In summary, while Ganzhou's leadership viewed peasant councils as examples of democracy at work, township and village officials more often treated them as extra manpower. Trusted for their political reliability, councils helped the government mediate conflict, raise money and prepare renovation contracts. Most villagers expressed respect for council members' social standing but viewed them as weak because they were subject to the daily supervision of work teams. In other words, peasant councils illustrate controlled participation within the context of a campaign. After becoming a model, Ganzhou's NSC exhibited several features of an ideological policy, as mentioned above. Confronted with a strong state, many villagers resigned themselves to change and looked to councils for help negotiating the best deal possible. As the campaign intensified, however, the space for negotiation grew smaller.

Policy Outcomes

Village modernization in Ganzhou has resulted in mixed outcomes, ranging from the basic upgrading of infrastructure to the total demolition and reconstruction of villages. On the positive side, the NSC has dramatically improved rural public infrastructure and sanitation, and has brought paved roads, electricity, clean water, flush toilets and trash collection services to over 21,000 villages. The city has also pledged to implement the "three clean-ups, three changes" in all remaining villages by 2020.⁶⁸ The scope of change is therefore significant, especially compared to places where only a few model villages have benefited from the NSC.⁶⁹

A far more controversial change is the preponderance of new housing. Seeing the NSC as a means of tapping into latent demand, the government gradually began to encourage people to "live like urbanites in multi-storey homes" and "return to the villages to build new homes." Financial institutions were authorized to grant home loans of up to 30,000 yuan, and official housing blueprints, said to combine traditional Hakka and modern aesthetics, were promoted to ensure that new homes look a certain way.⁷⁰ The city estimates five homes are built for every NSC site,⁷¹ meaning that over 105,000 homes were built from 2004 to 2012. As explained below, because of recent policies targeting dilapidated housing (*weifang gaizao* 危房改造), the number of homes built through 2013 likely exceeded 500,000.

67 Interviews with peasant councillors, Xingguo, 14 June 2010, and Longnan, 4 July 2010.

68 Interview with Pan Yiyang, Ganzhou, 23 June 2010.

69 On local variation, see Ahlers and Schubert 2013.

70 Ganzhou NSC Leading Group 2010, 18–25.

71 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 75.

Driving this rural housing boom are the city's 1.5 million migrant workers who, according to one official, have "returned in droves to build homes during the NSC, then gone back to the cities for work."⁷² As one migrant explained:

More and more of us can afford new homes and cars. For our children's education, many of us return, and when we heard about the new socialist countryside we happily built homes here. The village is cleaner and more comfortable than before, and building here costs half as much as buying in the township or county seat. There are so many three and four-storey homes now! Without us, this kind of new socialist countryside would be impossible.⁷³

Non-migrants are similarly motivated to improve their social position: "I saw new three-storey homes across the street, so I built a four-and-a-half-storey home."⁷⁴ Impressive from the outside, such homes often remain unfinished inside owing to the lack of funds.

Ganzhou's leaders have yet to voice concerns about rural household debt and instead see the housing boom as a success. They express pride that between 2003 and 2008 rural consumption grew from 8.7 to 14.7 billion yuan. Like many Chinese officials, they view the NSC as a mechanism for strengthening domestic demand.⁷⁵ However, villagers admit that everyone building a home must borrow from family and other unofficial sources, since banks insist that loans are repaid within a year and subsidies cover only one-tenth of the cost of a home (100,000 yuan on average). Unfortunately, rural debt is difficult to estimate because the government considers this information sensitive, an unsurprising attitude given the potential for public backlash against the re-emergence of peasant burdens.

The focus on new housing and consumption, absent from the original "three clean-ups, three changes" formulation, has not only increased household indebtedness but has also led to a more sweeping renovation approach called "demolish the old, build anew" (*chaijiu jianxin* 拆旧建新). Initially applied to villages with mostly abandoned or mud-brick housing, it has recently become commonplace. Negative outcomes include the destruction of historical and cultural artefacts, displacement of the rural poor, and relocation of villagers into apartments where they must adjust to a new lifestyle. The government generally covers renovation expenses for impoverished households, but this designation applies to less than 6 per cent of the rural population.⁷⁶ Peasant councils also encourage wealthier households to assist the poor, but these households are the ones most likely to build homes and have little extra money. Interviews suggest the NSC has pushed some poorer residents out of the villages: "They go to the 'hollow homes' and 'mud-brick homes' in villages that have not yet done the NSC."⁷⁷

72 Interview with township official, Shicheng, 28 July 2010.

73 Interview with villager, Shicheng, 29 July 2010.

74 Interview with villager, Shicheng, 27 July 2010.

75 Gannan Daily News Group 2009, 73–74, 77.

76 Tang 2009, 420–22.

77 Interview with villagers, Shicheng, 28 July 2010.

Two major state-supported relocation initiatives are “migrant new villages” (*yimin xincun* 移民新村) and “new rural communities” (*xinxing nongcun shequ* 新型农村社区). Built along the township outskirts, migrant new villages accommodate people from remote villages or areas affected by road and dam construction. Migrants receive non-farm vocational training and resettlement subsidies to help pay for new housing. By 2008, Ganzhou had built 174 migrant new villages for people from the “deep mountains.”⁷⁸ Although administered by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA), the RWD embraced this policy to avoid the high costs of renovating remote villages. Similarly, since 2007, the MOCA has promoted new rural community construction to provide services previously concentrated at the township and county levels (e.g. security, technology, welfare and legal services), and the RWD has encouraged residents of surrounding villages to build apartments in the communities. As [Figure 1](#) illustrates, Ganzhou’s communities fall between administrative and natural villages. Although the extent of relocation is uncertain, there were nearly 15,000 communities in 2010.⁷⁹

The impact of relocation on governance constitutes an important area for future research (not to mention the economic, social, cultural and other dimensions of relocation). When asked how relocation would affect household registration, land rights or village elections, officials seemed unsure and explained that the policies were experimental. Ganzhou’s rural communities each have a peasant council, supervisory council and Party small group. Supervisory councils are supposed to monitor peasant councils but site visits suggest they exist in name only. Policy documents highlight Party small groups as most important and call for Party members to “enter the communities and join the councils,”⁸⁰ further suggesting that peasant councils are subservient to the Party and exist more for mobilization than governance.

Overall, these outcomes serve as evidence of strong bureaucratic mobilization on the one hand and villagers’ limited participation in the policy process on the other. NSC plans for all villages were completed in the mid-2000s, despite the fact that most villages had yet to form councils or apply for NSC status. The demolition and reconstruction of housing intensified to the point of being total, affecting all households in the village. The policy on migrant new villages also became more compulsory, with local governments insisting that all villagers must relocate in order for any one household to receive policy benefits.⁸¹ Finally, peasant councils’ marginal status in the post-NSC village structure reveals that their already limited ability to represent village interests is unlikely to extend beyond the context of the campaign.

78 Tang 2009, 423.

79 Interviews with MOCA and RWD officials, Xingguo, 20 June 2010.

80 Ganzhou City Government 2010, 21.

81 Interview with RWD officials, Ruijin, 14 July 2013.

Evolution of the NSC

The NSC in Ganzhou has evolved in a few important ways – from basic renovation to total demolition and reconstruction; from diverse housing to uniform housing; from natural villages to rural communities; and lastly, from village renovation to urbanization. Initially, officials were instructed to renovate existing infrastructure using “three clean-ups, three changes” and to apply “demolish the old, build anew” sparingly. In early sites (2004–2007), many mud-brick homes remain but they now have water taps, flush toilets, paved entryways and freshly painted outer walls. In later sites (2008 to the present), mud-brick homes have mostly been replaced with homes made of concrete, brick and tile. In Ruijin 瑞金, for instance, villagers are pressured to select identical housing blueprints, then demolish and rebuild homes at the same pace. According to peasant councillors in Baihuayuan 百花园, the showpiece village for this approach, “villages with uniform housing are the prettiest.” Full of four-storey tiled homes with parking garages, the government considers Baihuayuan an exemplary achievement.⁸² Renovation strategies across villages have also become less diverse. In the NSC’s early years, different teams within a village implemented renovation differently, depending on work team recommendations and villagers’ preferences. However, after 2009, the city endorsed an approach called “connecting villages across an entire area,” which required teams within a village to implement renovation simultaneously. This strategy, integrated with new rural community construction, has produced more uniform-looking sites and shifted government investment from natural to central villages.⁸³ Recent policy documents still mention village renovation, but following Pan Yiyang’s departure for Inner Mongolia in 2010,⁸⁴ Ganzhou has adopted a different view of the NSC and now uses it to facilitate urbanization. The RWD continues to renovate larger villages, but the 2010–2015 NSC plan prioritized renovation of “central townships” and construction of “apartments for new urban citizens.”⁸⁵ The city selected 63 townships to accommodate 10,000 new residents each, doubling their populations. In 2010 alone, counties were instructed to “guide” 150,000 villagers into the townships and “encourage those with stable jobs to relinquish their housing plots and farmland.”⁸⁶

Finally, since 2012, two other policies have affected village modernization in Ganzhou. First, Jiangxi’s provincial government repackaged the NSC as “building harmonious and beautiful villages.” This resembles the earlier policy but

82 Interview with Baihuayuan peasant council, Ruijin, 18 July 2010; interview with RWD director, Ruijin, 17 July 2010.

83 Interview with RWD official, Xingguo, 25 June 2010.

84 That year, Pan became executive vice-chairman of Inner Mongolia and a member of Inner Mongolia’s CCP standing committee. In 2012, he became an alternate to the 18th Party Congress Central Committee. In September 2014, as part of Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign, Pan came under investigation for illegal dealings in the mining sector.

85 Only villages with over 50 households remain eligible for NSC funding; interview with RWD director, Anyuan, 12 July 2013.

86 Ganzhou Party Committee 2010, 2, 16–17; Ganzhou City Government 2010, 8–10.

more explicitly supports investment in townships to accommodate residents of small and remote villages. Second, the centre unveiled the “State Council measures to support the revitalization and development of Gannan and other central Soviet-base areas.” Backed by heavy central investment, this policy called for the renovation of all mud-brick housing by 2015.⁸⁷ The RWD assumed responsibility for this task and implemented it in much the same way as the NSC but with even more dizzying effect. By the end of 2013, the city completed renovation of 400,000 out of 695,187 mud-brick homes. Just a small subset of homes deemed historically significant were fortified and all others were demolished and reconstructed, often near urban areas.⁸⁸ This policy shares similarities with other regional development programmes such as “open up the west” and “revitalize the north-east,” as well as with programmes to renovate dilapidated housing being implemented nationwide. More interestingly, it follows the logic of indebtedness engineering described above. The government provides subsidies of up to 40,000 yuan for families with revolutionary credentials (less for others) who, in turn, must display political loyalty by, for example, adorning the entrance of new homes with calligraphy reading “always follow the Party, always love the Party.”⁸⁹

Conclusion

In light of recent trends, the most important years for village modernization were between 2004 and 2010. Under Pan’s leadership, the government mobilized the entire bureaucracy for the NSC. Traditional campaign tactics such as work teams and heavy propaganda were deployed, along with subsidies and peasant councils. The councils proved critical for generating popular support, collecting donations, mediating conflicts and overseeing renovation. Rather than evidence of participatory development, I have argued that the councils were heavily controlled and used primarily to extend state power and affect dramatic change. The mixed outcomes presented in this study caution against interpreting the NSC through an overly critical lens. For many in Ganzhou, the NSC represents a long overdue return to the pro-rural policies of the past. However, this analysis shows that certain features of China’s policy process and political system ultimately undermined the NSC’s success. After the Ganzhou model was scaled up, village modernization became a grand development project and drifted from its original focus on peasant-centred development and moderate change. Political pressure to deliver results and remain relevant in light of national policy trends, such as the shift towards urbanization near the end of Hu’s presidency, caused the NSC to become almost singularly focused on new housing. In fact, throughout China the NSC has become negatively associated with the demolition and

87 For the complete text of these policies, see http://www.jiangxi.gov.cn/dtxx/jxyw/201208/t20120815_762437.htm; http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2012-07/02/content_2174947.htm. Accessed 28 March 2014.

88 Liu, Shian, and Wu 2013.

89 Site visit, Anyuan, 10 July 2013.

reconstruction of villages, an outcome that clearly suggests villagers' influence over the campaign has been limited.

This research has implications for the literature on China's policy process, rural participation and, more broadly, consultative governance. The NSC in Ganzhou, despite being an example of local policy innovation, reveals another side to China's policy process that is more top-down and less flexible than existing scholarship maintains. Ganzhou's pragmatic and inclusive approach to rural policy was undermined after it acquired national model status, owing to the strength of bureaucratic mobilization and the problems associated with ideological policies. Perhaps if the government had involved other rural organizations besides peasant councils, the NSC in Ganzhou would have turned out differently. Recent work on the "new rural reconstruction" movement, a non-governmental rural reform initiative that preceded the NSC, shows that associations for the elderly and farmers' cooperatives have been instrumental in promoting development.⁹⁰ Relatedly, research on lineage groups highlights their positive effect on rural governance.⁹¹ Although peasant-driven change is certainly possible in China, this study suggests that it is unlikely in the context of a large-scale development campaign. Finally, scholars writing about responsive or consultative authoritarianism note the Chinese communist regime's willingness to accommodate public opinion and the demands of civil society and other social forces, which contributes to the regime's resilience.⁹² While it is tempting to view Ganzhou's peasant councils as evidence of consultative governance, their limited power at the grassroots level actually calls into question the use of such an overarching concept to describe China's political system. Moving forward, more research is needed to understand local variation in the processes and outcomes of village modernization, as well as the aggregate effects of the NSC on China's rural development.

摘要: 21 世纪头十年的中期以来, 中国政府在建设社会主义新农村的口号之下推动乡村现代化。本文通过分析江西省赣州市的案例试图解释该政策的来龙去脉。赣州作为农村发展的全国性模式, 利用农民理事会推动政策实行。本研究发现, 尽管政策最初强调农民参与和渐进式改变, 但是在很多地方, 新农村建设最后演化成一场自上而下、大拆大建的运动。造成这个结果有三个因素: 行政体制过于强势, 农民组织的孱弱, 以及国家政策的转变。在成功取得国家模式地位后, 赣州的农村政策变得更加雄心勃勃, 其目的趋向政治化, 农民参与的空间更为压缩。这种见解显示, 中国的政策制定和实施既有实惠, 又有代价。尽管地方政策创新获益良多, 然而从地方实验提升到国家政策将削弱其成功。

关键词: 建设社会主义新农村; 农村发展; 乡村住房; 政治参与; 政策实施

90 Thøgersen 2009; Day 2013, 154–185; Hale 2013.

91 Tsai 2007.

92 See, e.g., Weller 2008; Tsang 2009.

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