

A Study on Addressing the Root Causes of Organized Crime in Rural China

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Abstract: Merely implementing campaign-style strict enforcement measures proves inadequate for fundamentally preventing and controlling the proliferation of organized crime in rural areas. Thus, addressing the root causes of such criminal activities becomes a necessary strategy. The genesis of organized crime in rural regions distinctly differs from urban areas, marked by unique political, economic, cultural, and social underpinnings. These root factors not only foster an environment conducive to the growth of organized crime but also weaken the mechanisms of social control in rural areas. Furthermore, they diminish the resistance willingness and capability of the rural population, leading to the breeding of criminal activities. Consequently, effective governance of rural organized crime demands substantial reforms in the political, economic, cultural, and social fabric of rural settings, coupled with an enhancement of the rural populace's political and economic stature at multiple levels.

Keywords: Organized Crime in Rural China; Political Factors; Economic Factors; Cultural Factors; Social Factors

1 Introduction

Between 2018 and 2020, China embarked on a three-year initiative aimed at cracking down on organized crime. This effort led to the dismantling of 3,644 organized crime groups and 11,675 criminal gangs, and the arrest of 237,000 suspects, surpassing the total achievements of the preceding decade by 1.3 times. Nonetheless, this campaign largely mirrored the intensity and rapid response approach of previous "strike-hard" operations, raising concerns about potential recurring cycles of criminal activities. Recognizing this pattern, in 2021, the Chinese government released "Opinions on Regularizing the Campaign to Crack Down on organized crime and Consolidate the Achievements of the Special Operation." This directive proposed the establishment of six systematic mechanisms, with the foremost focusing on preventative measures at the source - a strategy targeting both the symptoms and root causes of organized crime through more profound governance. Specifically speaking, source governance means shifting the focus of intervention to earlier stages, preemptively addressing the conditions that breed conflicts and issues, rather than relying on reactive, emergency measures.^[1] By 2022, with around 500 million residents in rural areas, comprising over 94% of China's land mass, these regions' distinctive

characteristics necessitate a more nuanced approach to combating organized crime. This paper aims to dissect the political, economic, cultural, and social roots fostering organized crime in rural China, explore their operational mechanisms, and ultimately suggest refined strategies to mitigate the conditions conducive to the proliferation of such criminal activities in these rural landscapes.

2 Characteristic Analysis of Organized Crime in Rural China

The term "rural organized crime" was first coined in the academic realm, influenced by the 1994 Wang Yinghan hooligan crime syndicate case in Chengmai, Hainan. As the new century unfolded, the rise of local criminal powers, often referred to as "village bullies," "township tyrants," and "city despots," became rampant across rural landscapes,^[2] adapting and morphing in line with societal progression. An in-depth examination of the patterns of rural organized crime reveals several distinctive and notable features.

2.1 Organizational Characteristics

1. Pronounced kinship and geographic connections. Despite China's shift from an acquaintance-based to a stranger-based society, kinship and geographic relationships continue to exert substantial influence in rural areas. Organized crime groups often comprise

members linked by familial and local ties. A frequent occurrence is the formation of criminal syndicates by influential clans, consisting of individuals from extensive family networks connected through blood, marriage, or proximity. These groups exploit their numerical strength for exclusive and selfish agendas, engaging in unlawful acts.

2. Notable infiltration into grassroots governance. A defining characteristic of rural organized crime is its penetration into and control over grassroots political structures. Numerous members of rural grassroots organizations maintain close associations with criminal groups. Organized crime elements actively interfere in the electoral processes of rural governance, transforming these institutions into instruments of criminal activities. Additionally, they use a mix of bribery and coercion against members of rural governance, employing both aggressive and subtle tactics to secure indirect control. This strategy is aimed at suppressing local communities and extracting benefits.

3. Evident "protective umbrellas." The phenomenon of protective umbrellas in rural areas takes various forms: firstly, there are influential officials who hold sway locally and use their power to back and shield criminal elements; secondly, within the judicial system, certain police officers partake in unethical practices, such as leaking sensitive information, indulging in corruption, and twisting the law to favor illicit activities. Lastly, at the grassroots level, some officials, despite occupying crucial positions, neglect their duties and fail to exercise their authority appropriately.^[3] The presence of these protective umbrellas not only intensifies the challenge of managing organized crime but also diminishes the state's credibility and authority.

2.2 Economic Features

1. Economic gain as the core objective. In the evolving social context, the pursuit of economic benefit has emerged as the central aim of rural organized crime, moving beyond mere conflicts and thrill-seeking of the past. Organized groups systematically amass wealth

through illicit activities or unfair means, safeguarding business interests through criminal influence. Furthermore, they leverage these ill-gotten economic gains to sustain the activities of their criminal networks, essentially using business operations to fund criminal endeavors.

2. Typical sources of illicit economic benefits in rural organized crime. Firstly, the rural infrastructure development sector. Accelerated urbanization and rural revitalization initiatives have led to numerous substantial projects in rural infrastructure, making this area a lucrative target for criminal entities. Secondly, the land development sector. The urbanization process entails extensive land acquisition, relocation, and land transactions, all harboring significant economic interests and becoming a primary focus for criminal activities. Thirdly, the exploitation of traditional resources. This involves criminal dominance over natural resources such as mining, forestry, and water management, and manipulative market practices. They coerce and control markets for essential goods and services, leading to the emergence of various types of market bullies.

2.3 Behavioral Features

1. Corporatization. Since the turn of the millennium, organized crime in China has increasingly penetrated legitimate industries, extending its influence into rural areas. The rise in market dynamics has led to the adoption of corporate organizational models as the prevalent method for executing criminal activities within rural organized crime. These activities have expanded beyond traditional realms to include illicit financial schemes like predatory lending and cash loan operations.

2. Evolution towards soft violence. Although a segment of rural organized crime still engages in traditional forms of violence, there has been a marked shift towards 'soft violence.' This subtler form of aggression includes tactics such as threats and intimidation, organized disturbances, damaging reputations, and personal insults. These methods are strategically employed by criminals to sidestep legal repercussions while fulfilling their illegal aims.

3. Adoption of information technologies. In response to the progression in information technology and enhanced digital capabilities of criminals, rural organized crime is now leveraging the internet to facilitate a range of criminal endeavors. Predominant among these are online schemes like predatory lending, "sextortion," baseless litigations, manipulation of internet public opinion for extortion, cyber-based pyramid selling, and aggressive digital debt collection strategies.

3 Root Cause Analysis of Organized Crime in Rural Areas

Numerous studies have highlighted that a confluence of political, economic, cultural, and social challenges forms the breeding ground for criminal elements.

3.1 Political Factors Contributing to Rural Organized Crime

At the political level, the operational state of rural self-governing institutions and the governance capacity and efficacy of local governments are critical factors contributing to the proliferation of organized crime in rural settings.

1. Alienation of the Rural Autonomy System

Firstly, there is a noticeable trend towards the marginalization within the structure of rural autonomous organizations. As per the "Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China" (referred to as the "Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees"), the composition of the Villagers' Committees ought to be a direct result of elections held by the villagers themselves, with no organization or individual having the authority to appoint, delegate, or remove these members. However, in practice, the transparency of these elections is often compromised, leading to widespread disenfranchisement and marginalization of many villagers. A common issue is the nominal nature of election procedures, where committee members are sometimes pre-selected by town or township leaders, followed by token elections. Additionally, the electoral process is marred by blatant instances of vote canvassing, bribery, and purchase of votes. Moreover, the prevalent "hollowing out"

phenomenon in rural areas presents a challenging scenario in village committee elections, marked by a dual deficiency: a lack of both active electors and qualified candidates. A significant aspect of this dilemma is the noticeable lack of participation from the majority of rural elites as contenders in these elections. The introduction of the 2019 "Regulations of the Communist Party of China on Rural Work" encouraged the dual role of Village Branch Secretaries and Villagers' Committee Directors, further narrowing the selection pool. Additionally, elderly villagers who vote by proxy often do so under fear or dependency on village officials, resulting in controlled and uncompetitive elections.^[4] Lastly, irregularities in the electoral process, such as simplified voter registration and the absence of legitimate proxy voting, exacerbate the marginalization. This disenfranchisement of autonomous organizations leads to a lack of effective avenues for most villagers to voice their interests, thereby diminishing their sense of autonomy and facilitating a minority's control over these organizations.

Secondly, there's operational marginalization. Alongside this power imbalance, the majority of villagers find themselves sidelined in the day-to-day operations of self-governance bodies. Legally, villagers are entitled to participate in governing rural affairs according to established procedures. Activities like formulating village economic development plans, creating village regulations and charters for self-governance are supposed to involve village meetings for discussion and resolution, ensuring the broad representation and protection of most villagers' interests. However, the reality often shows an excessive centralization of power in rural autonomous organizations. The "Two Committees" at the village level, consisting of the Village Party Branch Committee and the Villagers' Committee monopolize all affairs, often centralizing decision-making, financial, and authoritative powers in a single person's hands. Crucial meetings, including those of party members, villagers, village representatives, and subgroup assemblies, are rarely convened, often reduced to formalities, or dominated by committee

members' relatives and confidants. This dynamic prevents most villagers from engaging in meaningful decision-making regarding village affairs, leaving their interests unaddressed and neglected, and relegating them to an easily overlooked segment of the population.

Finally, there's a marginalization in the oversight aspect. Effectively supervising rural autonomous organizations remains a major challenge. First, the village supervisory mechanism often exists in name only. The "Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees" mandates the establishment of village supervision committees or similar oversight bodies, responsible for overseeing various village affairs, with members elected by the villagers. In reality, however, these supervisory bodies are frequently inactive, unknown to many villagers, reducing their intended function to a theoretical concept. Second, the village affairs transparency system is inadequately implemented. Although legally required to operate transparently and subject to villagers' scrutiny, in practice, the dissemination of relevant information to villagers is inadequate, making effective supervision challenging, if not impossible.

2. Diminished Governance Capacity of Rural Autonomous Organizations

Firstly, there is a notable shift in the governance focus of these organizations. Although legal guidelines stipulate that Villagers' Committees should assist and work under the guidance of township and town governments without undue interference in autonomous matters, the reality presents a starkly different scenario. The autonomy of Villagers' Committees has been considerably weakened, transforming them into mere extensions of grassroots government. Township governments often control the election of the "Two Committees" at the village level and exert influence over their financial operations, effectively implementing a system where village finances are managed at the township level. Additionally, townships frequently delegate numerous administrative tasks outside the scope of village autonomy to these committees, thereby overburdening them with extensive

grassroots administrative duties. Such dynamics force rural autonomous organizations to depend heavily on the grassroots government and focus primarily on assigned tasks, significantly undercutting their autonomy. Consequently, the relationship between townships and villages has shifted from a "guidance-guided" dynamic to a "leader-executor" model, eroding the autonomy of rural entities.^[5]

Secondly, the effectiveness of governance by these rural autonomous organizations is markedly suboptimal. In the context of altered structures and shifted governance objectives, these bodies struggle to achieve effective self-governance. With the structural transformation of rural autonomous organizations, villagers' engagement in local public affairs has significantly decreased. The difficulty in involving genuine rural elites in self-governance processes not only weakens the power of autonomy but also leads to less rational and scientific policymaking. Furthermore, rural autonomous organizations that fail to represent the majority's interests suffer from reduced credibility and intrinsic authority, struggling to exert leadership and guidance, and facing challenges in effectively regulating villagers or managing village affairs. Finally, the two committees at the village level tend to focus less on autonomous affairs in their operational content and adopt governance styles akin to those of grassroots governments. They continue to rely predominantly on traditional, rigid governance methods, lacking modern autonomy concepts and approaches.

3. Governance Deficit at the Grassroots Level

Firstly, there exists a dependency and coexistence between grassroots authorities and criminal factions. Grassroots governments often grapple with shortages of manpower, material resources, and funding, while local officials typically exhibit limited governance abilities and outdated administrative philosophies. To expedite task completion, they sometimes rely on criminal groups, particularly when facing complex challenges. These groups, through illicit means, can rapidly resolve issues, becoming a resource and support for rural governance.

Over time, these criminal elements may transform into auxiliary stabilizers of rural social order, rather than disruptors, establishing a mutual dependency with certain grassroots authorities. This relationship fosters a harmful cycle: some grassroots authorities delegate specific functions to these criminal groups for handling difficult matters, while the groups thrive and expand under the tacit endorsement and protection of these authorities.

Secondly, an attitude of avoidance and inaction is pervasive among grassroots officials when facing criminal organizations, further highlighting the governance void. Many rural criminal groups, deeply entangled in complex clan and kinship networks and possessing considerable influence and economic power, have long troubled local communities. Grassroots government officials, often facing high job turnover, typically exhibit a passive, risk-averse mentality. Even without direct connections to these groups, they frequently avoid confrontation, opting instead to preserve the status quo, which indirectly facilitates the continued proliferation of criminal activities.

Finally, the lack of a bottom-up approach in governance is notable. China's governance model has primarily been top-down, missing effective mechanisms to channel grassroots-level pressures upward. This leads to a significant gap where grassroots governments lack genuine engagement with the real needs and interests of rural communities. For grassroots officials, their predominant obligation is to respond to higher authorities, often overlooking the pressures and needs emanating from their local communities. This dynamic can result in neglect and ineffectiveness at the grassroots governance level, creating a vacuum swiftly filled by criminal elements. In certain regions, the absence of grassroots pressure makes local authorities susceptible to manipulation by these groups, sometimes even leading to their transformation into representatives of these criminal elements.

3.2 Economic Factors Contributing to Rural Organized Crime

1. Capitalization of Rural Autonomous Bodies

During rapid societal changes, materialism has

surged, leading to a capitalization trend within rural self-governance bodies. Post-reform, a notable institutional anomie has been observed in China,^[6] where economic norms infiltrate all social domains. Consequently, individuals or groups with substantial capital and financial influence become more likely to usurp control of rural autonomous organizations from those who were previously esteemed for their virtue and reputation. However, the primary aim of these economically driven individuals in taking control is not to serve the public good, but rather to leverage public authority for personal gain, thereby securing greater economic advantages. In practice, this often translates to self-proclaimed rural "elites" using their capital, connections, and influence to secure excessive benefits, seeking positions in Villagers' Committees to further their opportunistic pursuits. Additionally, factions formed around familial, blood, or kinship ties manipulate and control these autonomous bodies through corrupt means like bribery and fraud to secure illegal economic gains. In certain rural areas, these organizations have become arenas for capital forces to wrestle and divide profits. Simultaneously, the substantial internal wealth disparity in rural communities exacerbates this issue. Surveys indicate that in 2019, the income gap between the richest 20% and poorest 20% of rural households reached a staggering 8.46:1.^[7] This pronounced wealth gap intensifies the capital's grip over self-governance bodies, and their increasing capitalization further deepens the rural economic divide, creating a harmful and self-perpetuating cycle.

2. Reduced Market Transparency in Rural Areas

Following the economic reforms, China's focus on urban development resulted in relatively delayed economic growth in rural regions, leading to lower levels of market transparency and resulting in regulatory laxity or even oversight vacuums. Firstly, the degree of marketization and transparency in rural areas is generally subdued. The rural economy, largely subordinate to urban economic dynamics, exhibits relative backwardness and isolation, with a limited extent of marketization in

production factors and other economic sectors, failing to establish an open and orderly market ecosystem. Secondly, in the trajectory of marketization, there is a notable deficiency in regulatory oversight across various sectors, and the government's economic governance and standardization of regulatory activities are less developed. This includes a lack of adequate resources for regulatory enforcement, exemplified by the limited presence of industrial and commercial administrative branches in townships. Additionally, the vast expanse of rural markets poses significant challenges in departmental coordination. This weakened regulatory framework leads to substantial blind spots in rural markets, particularly in critical sectors such as land development, construction projects, and food safety, which frequently become key areas for criminal elements to exploit for illegal gains over prolonged periods.

3. Modest Compensation for Grassroots Autonomous Organization Officials

Within the existing framework, village officials are not categorized as national public servants and generally experience heavier responsibilities and lower compensation compared to their counterparts in townships or other civil service roles. Current statistics indicate that the highest salary for village officials, in areas like Beijing and Shanghai, is approximately 2,500 yuan per month, while it remains below 2,000 yuan in other regions, with even lower standards in remote areas.^[8] Alongside this, the acknowledged reality of high work pressure and substantial responsibilities at the grassroots level creates a mismatch between income, effort, and perceived status, leading to various adverse outcomes. Firstly, it impacts the structural composition of the rural cadre workforce, as highly capable and ambitious individuals in rural communities often eschew joining the cadre ranks in favor of higher-paying opportunities elsewhere, with many aspiring to urban residency. Secondly, the imbalance between workload and compensation fails to effectively motivate village officials, hindering their full engagement in village self-governance activities and further weakening

the operational capacity and effectiveness of rural autonomous organizations. Lastly, this situation can lead to a sense of relative deprivation among village officials, potentially driving them to compensate through the misuse of power and engagement in self-serving corrupt practices, thereby exacerbating the overall social milieu in rural areas.

3.3 Cultural Factors Contributing to Rural Organized Crime

Culture not only shapes individuals' values but also guides and regulates their behavior. The proliferation of criminal gangs in rural areas has deep-seated cultural origins

1. Weakening of the Normative Role of Dominant Culture

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the nation embarked on a period of rapid transformation characterized by uneven development. While material civilization surged ahead, spiritual development lagged behind, failing to establish a dominant cultural framework in harmony with material progress, thus resulting in a notable phenomenon known as "cultural lag."^[9] In this milieu, the pursuit of material wealth assumed paramount importance in people's lives, with economic and material standards serving as the yardstick for all endeavors. Consequently, the overarching cultural system struggled to synchronize and progress collectively, leading to a gradual erosion of its intrinsic informal social control mechanisms. China has long placed emphasis on informal cultural mechanisms to govern human behavior, with cultural informal control often superseding formal social control measures during various historical periods. This trend is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where village regulations and customs traditionally played a pivotal role in regulating community conduct. However, the phenomenon of uneven development and the proliferation of materialism have undermined the informal social control mechanisms inherent in traditional culture. Consequently, individuals have increasingly veered away from the values

encapsulated in venerable traditional culture and no longer adhere to its guiding principles. Instead, there has been a growing tendency to flout established norms and resort to any means necessary to pursue material wealth. This shift towards materialism has supplanted traditional moral values, thereby exacerbating societal disarray.

2. Subject Mentality and Gangster Logic

In rural Chinese culture, two deeply ingrained cultural maladies persist: the subject mentality and the gangster logic. Firstly, the so-called "subject mentality," also known as the subject personality, manifests as a simplistic political consciousness, blind reverence for authority, and a lack of active political participation. This mentality is particularly entrenched in rural areas, where the majority of peasants at the bottom of society tend to be timid and submissive, unquestioningly obedient to authority, and lacking the courage to defend their own rights. To some extent, the subject mentality has solidified into the cultural psyche and behavioral habits of millions of farmers in their political lives. Farmers are often subconsciously dominated or influenced by the mentality and behavioral habits of subjects, which are instinctual, subconscious, and stubborn.^[10] Secondly, the concept of the gangster logic suggests that power and money are the ultimate arbiters, and the goal of acquiring power and wealth is to wield authority and indulge in luxury. Those with power or wealth are expected to act accordingly. Oppressed individuals may not perceive injustice, and may even consider it reasonable. Essentially, the logic of banditry represents a primitive and low-level survival principle characterized by the law of the jungle.

3. Deficiency of Legal Culture

Amidst overall cultural stagnation, the advancement of legal culture in rural areas is particularly challenging. Firstly, there's a critical shortage of legal resources. While quality legal services are mainly concentrated in urban regions, rural areas suffer from a severe lack of legal infrastructure and insufficient public legal service provision. Rural areas not only face a dearth of professional legal practitioners but also lack institutions

capable of providing high-quality legal services. For the broader peasant population, the high cost and limited availability of legal services pose significant barriers to accessing necessary legal support. Secondly, the level of legal consciousness is notably inadequate. Influenced by the subject mentality and bandit logic, many peasants possess an unclear understanding of their rights and often fail to consider legal solutions when encountering issues. On one hand, there exists a psychological resistance to litigation, a preference for emotional resolution over legal procedures, a belief in unwritten rules, and a habitual reliance on personal connections and informal practices for dispute resolution. On the other hand, there is an absence of modern legal consciousness and a lack of faith in the rule of law. This leads to a longing for ethical governance by individuals rather than a system-based legal governance structure.

3.4 Social Factors Contributing to Rural Organized Crime

1. Class Stratification Amidst Inadequate Education

In the context of persistent urban-rural developmental disparities, educational advancement in rural areas has been notably lagging. Firstly, the allocation of resources to rural education is insufficient, leading to poor remuneration for teachers, which weakens the overall teaching quality and hinders the retention of skilled educators. Additionally, rural schools often suffer from substandard facilities, creating a challenging learning environment for students. Secondly, this scarcity in educational investment directly impacts the overall teaching quality in rural settings. On one hand, basic education falls short in providing peasants with the necessary knowledge and skills for thriving in a rural context.^[11] On the other hand, the monotony of educational content in rural areas fails to meet diverse educational demands. The weakness in education perpetuates the lower social status of the majority of peasants. The adage "it's hard for those from humble backgrounds to achieve greatness" is a direct reflection of the frail state of rural education. When education, a key to breaking free from

class constraints, is obstructed, most peasants remain entrenched at the lower tiers of political and economic hierarchies. This not only makes it more challenging for them to safeguard their rights across various domains but also further solidifies their subject mentality and bandit logic, exacerbating their lack of legal knowledge and weak legal consciousness.

2. Social Disintegration in the Context of Rapid Social Transformation

In the midst of rapid social change, rural areas are facing significant social disintegration. Firstly, the disintegration of family structures is particularly severe. This is primarily manifested in the hollowing out of rural families. Owing to the stark disparity in urban and rural development and the ongoing urbanization process, there has been a consistent migration of rural labor to cities. Statistics over the past decade indicate an increasing urban and decreasing rural population, leading to substantial human capital depletion in rural areas, thus diminishing family stability and cohesion. Secondly, there is a marked increase in heterogeneity. The once-insular rural communities have become more open and mobile, shifting from a uniform way of life and cultural customs to greater diversity and differentiation. The acceleration of urbanization has further intensified community dispersion, strengthening individualism, autonomy, and independence among villagers. Consequently, rural societies are transitioning from homogeneity to heterogeneity. Lastly, the close connection between villages and their residents has weakened, leading to a reduced sense of belonging and identification with the village. The traditional relational norms are losing their binding force, with economics and personal interests becoming more prominent in social interactions, and a growing indifference to local customs and relationships. As the villagers' dependence on and identification with their village community diminish, the social foundation essential for nurturing internal village authority is continuously weakened.^[12]

3. Insufficiency of Social Security in Rural Areas

In the post-reform era, despite significant efforts

spanning decades, rural social security has seen some progress but continues to grapple with issues such as incomplete system frameworks, universally low protection levels, and unrefined management mechanisms. In practical terms, there are substantial disparities between urban and rural areas and among different demographic groups. A majority of rural residents still face considerable financial burdens in areas like retirement, healthcare, and education, with phenomena like 'education-induced poverty' and 'healthcare-induced poverty' persistently present. Additionally, while years of dedicated poverty alleviation initiatives have substantially addressed absolute poverty in China, relative poverty and the risk of re-improvement after escaping poverty remain significant challenges.^[13] The inadequacies in social security further exacerbate the precarious situation of most rural residents, especially impeding the amelioration of conditions for low-income and poverty-stricken groups, intensifying the wealth disparity within rural communities, and consequently affecting social stability in these areas.

4. Enduring Challenges in Public Security Management

Regarding social governance, although initiatives like "Safe Rural Community" projects have led to some improvements in rural public security, deep-seated challenges persist and are far from fundamentally resolved.^[14] Firstly, there is a notable inadequacy in the public security management forces. On one side, there is a discernible weakness in national security resources. In rural regions, the shortfall of policing forces is apparent, with instances of individuals fulfilling multiple roles being common, alongside a generally subdued overall response capacity. On the other side, the strength of local governance regarding public security is markedly deficient. The alteration of the rural autonomous system, combined with the disintegration of rural social structures, has resulted in a significant deficit in community-level security initiatives. Additionally, there is a lack of a unified drive among residents to collectively uphold and maintain the social order in rural areas. Secondly, there

is a delay in the development of concepts and models in criminal governance. The prevailing governance approach continues to be managerial, particularly in the area of rural criminal governance, which tends to manifest in simplistic and heavy-handed methods of action. Concurrently, the primary focus is on traditional stability maintenance, without delving into more profound levels of governance.

4 Strategies for Tackling the Root Causes of Organized Crime in Rural China

Effective eradication of problems necessitates understanding their origins, and efficient disease management requires cutting off its source. Governance of rural criminal gangs should focus on building a system at the social governance level that synergizes self-governance, virtue-based governance, and legal governance, enhancing intrinsic motivation and self-governance efficacy, thereby eliminating breeding grounds for criminal elements.

4.1 Improving the Political Landscape in Rural Areas

The improvement of the political landscape centers on repairing and enhancing the grassroots political ecosystem. This involves bolstering the self-governance functions of rural autonomous organizations, strengthening the governance capabilities and effectiveness of local government, and creating a well-ordered, complementary governance system.

1. Stringent Selection of Rural Autonomous Organization Personnel

It is crucial to strictly adhere to relevant laws and regulations in conducting elections for members of village committees, guaranteeing that these processes are open and transparent. This approach ensures that the elected members of the village committees authentically represent the will of the majority of farmers and are effectively responsive to their broader needs and concerns. Firstly, the functionality of the village election committee must be reinforced to guarantee its fairness and impartiality. Secondly, the candidate selection and vetting process should be stringent, with clearly defined, quantifiable

criteria and review procedures. It is crucial to prevent individuals with negative records from being nominated, ensuring only those with high esteem and strong capabilities, fitting the profile of respected figures in the new era, are included on the candidate list. Following the confirmation of the candidate list, public disclosure should be undertaken, allowing villagers to voice objections, which the election committee should address with clear, public responses. Thirdly, rigorous voter registration and eligibility reviews are essential, ensuring all qualified villagers can exercise their voting rights and articulate their views and interests through the election. Finally, the voting process must adhere to legal norms, featuring anonymous voting, open counting, and immediate public disclosure of results, ensuring transparency throughout the process.

2. Strengthening Operations and Oversight within Rural Autonomous Organizations

Firstly, there is a need for advancing operational standardization. A key area for improvement is the tendency for village committee members to monopolize handling all affairs, both significant and minor. This calls for enhancing and refining the mechanisms of village assemblies and representative meetings. It's essential to rigorously follow relevant legal frameworks when reviewing and evaluating the annual work reports of the village committees through these assemblies, including possessing the authority to revoke or amend any unsuitable decisions made by committee members. Furthermore, for major issues affecting the interests of villagers, resolutions should be reached through deliberations in either village assemblies or representative meetings. Moreover, village committees should take the initiative to draft autonomy charters or village regulations tailored to their specific characteristics, followed by discussions and approvals in these assemblies or meetings. This process ensures that various aspects of village self-governance are well-regulated, offering clear behavioral guidelines for villagers and cultivating an atmosphere where adherence to rules is a shared value, thus fostering effective self-governance

within the community.

Secondly, developing a comprehensive oversight mechanism is essential. Enhancing the supervision of the operations of rural autonomous organizations can drive the standardization of power execution, thereby improving the effectiveness of self-governance. First and foremost, there is a need to strengthen and rigorously implement the village affairs transparency system. Village committees should comply with relevant regulations, ensuring timely disclosure of village affairs and financial statuses, thereby facilitating oversight by villagers. This is particularly crucial for matters that significantly impact villagers' interests and attract widespread attention. Moreover, meticulous record-keeping and archiving should be upheld to enable easy access to information by villagers. Subsequently, establishing and fortifying village affairs supervisory bodies is crucial. As per relevant laws, dedicated institutions like village affairs supervision committees should be instituted, tasked with overseeing village operations and the execution of village regulations. Furthermore, organizing village assemblies or representative meetings to democratically assess the performance of village committees is vital. Finally, enhancing the rural audit and supervision systems is paramount. Complementary systems should be refined, encouraging larger townships to set up audit stations dedicated to overseeing village-level projects and financial management. This approach will further solidify village-level audit supervision, ensuring standardized management and utilization of finances and assets.

3. Elevating the Governance Efficacy of Grassroots Governments

Initially, it is paramount to consolidate the governance responsibilities incumbent upon grassroots governments. This begins with the enhancement of institutional improvement, orchestrating a collaborative and coordinated effort across various stakeholders to institute a normalized mechanism for prevention and responsive actions. Following this, the establishment of definitive objectives and the implementation of

a responsibility-driven framework are essential in encouraging these entities to overcome a reluctance to act, fostering a disposition towards both willingness and ability to take decisive actions. Critical in this endeavor is the directive for grassroots governments to deliberately penetrate industries and regions that are recurrent hotbeds of nefarious elements, actively assimilating the voices and grievances of the populace. This dual approach serves not only to expedite the identification of any illicit activities but also facilitates the timely mitigation of adverse elements, thus preemptively forestalling potential crises. In conclusion, the establishment of mechanisms for accountability and retrospective analysis is crucial. These systems should embolden grassroots governments to fearlessly adopt a stringent approach in combating criminal elements and to persistently maintain an atmosphere of heightened vigilance and pressure.

Secondly, it is imperative to refine and optimize governance methods and paths. Grassroots governments should transition from a previously top-down paradigm, fostering the participation of the wider farming community and social forces in governance, thereby enhancing governance capabilities and eliminating reliance and symbiosis with nefarious forces. Initially, this necessitates a proactive alteration of governance concepts to achieve a synthesis of top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down governance model harbors the peril of detachment from the populace, potentially leading to difficulties in grasping the actual rural circumstances and in making scientifically informed decisions. Integrating a bottom-up governance model can invigorate the participatory consciousness of the broader farming community and effectively mobilize their enthusiasm. Subsequently, establishing a concept of pluralistic co-governance and constructing a novel governance system involving diverse entities such as the government, society and the public is crucial. This is particularly pertinent in emphasizing the incorporation of professional forces from the societal level to address challenges that the government itself may struggle to manage effectively. In instances where

the government is incapable or ineffective, delegating certain functions to specialized social forces can break the dependent and symbiotic relationship with malevolent forces, thus fostering a beneficial interaction between societal and governmental powers.

Thirdly, the establishment of a top-down mechanism for the transmission of pressures. Initially, it necessitates the creation of institutionalized channels for the expression and feedback of villagers' interests. The well-being, security, and sense of accomplishment of the broader farming community should be considered as critical metrics for evaluating the efficacy of governments at the grassroots level. By striving to safeguard the immediate interests of the populace, an enhancement in the operational methodologies and governance capabilities of the government can be achieved. Subsequently, the formulation of a symbiotic relationship between township governments and rural self-governing organizations is imperative. On one hand, it is essential for the rural self-governance organizations to revert to their fundamental functions, focusing on enabling villagers to self-manage and serve their own interests, rather than being perceived as subordinate or affiliated to township governments. On the other hand, township-level governments must recalibrate their roles, delineate their responsibilities clearly, and provide effective guidance, assistance, and support to grassroots self-governing bodies, thereby invigorating their vitality and motivation. Lastly, the establishment of a public supervision mechanism is crucial, so as to create a conduit for communication between the government and villagers. The government must proactively submit to public oversight and critique, and promptly disseminate feedback regarding issues of public concern.

4.2 Improving Economic Foundations in Rural Areas

In the context of improving economic foundations, it is imperative to reduce the wealth disparity, mitigate the pervasive effects of materialism and elevate the economic status of the rural populace within rural sectors by persistently advancing the revitalization of villages.

Concurrently, it is essential to bolster the oversight of rural markets to ensure their transparency.

1. Intensification of Rural Market Supervision

Firstly, it is essential to enhance supervision efforts in key sectors and industries. Targeted monitoring activities should be meticulously conducted in crucial commodities, major industries, key venues and vital areas. Abundant empirical evidence indicates that the economic criminal activities of nefarious forces follow discernible patterns. Consequently, supervision focuses and challenges should be identified based on existing experiences. This involves organizing specialized teams to intensify investigations and conduct specific inspection operations, coupled with the implementation of regular, concentrated law enforcement checks. Simultaneously, significant cases that are uncovered must be investigated and disclosed in accordance with the law, thereby establishing a long-term warning mechanism.

Secondly, it is imperative to establish a sustainable mechanism for routine supervision. This entails the enhancement of various regulatory systems and actively fostering a long-term mechanism for the oversight of rural markets. Specifically, this involves, on one hand, the intensification of regular supervision activities, strengthening routine inspections, focusing on critical stages and key areas to augment the specificity and efficacy of these inspections, thus to ensure a thorough implementation. On the other hand, it involves guiding the rural populace to heighten their awareness of market transparency and legal consciousness regarding market competition, expanding channels for reporting and supervision, and encouraging the broader rural community to oversee and report illegal competitive activities, thereby cultivating a diversified social monitoring system within the rural market.

2. Eradicating the Capitalization of Rural Autonomous Organizations

Firstly, it is crucial to mitigate the adverse effects of materialistic value systems. There is a need to rectify the prevailing materialistic values and alleviate the anomic

pressures that arise from the predominance of materialism. On an individual level, guidance should be provided to the public to integrate the pursuit of material well-being with that of spiritual life, to aim for a more holistic personal development. It is important to guide individuals in setting a variety of goals for success, advocating for multiple standards of success, and elevating goals beyond wealth accumulation and material pursuits to a status recognized and valued at the cultural, national or societal level. This approach can, on one hand, alleviate the societal pressure of pursuing material success and, on the other hand, facilitate the flow of talents into other various societal sectors, thereby promoting balanced and comprehensive development across the society.

Secondly, it is essential to advance rural revitalization comprehensively and narrow the wealth gap. Upholding the increase of farmers' incomes as the central task in implementing the rural revitalization strategy is paramount. This involves continually refining policy provisions and expanding income-generating channels. Concurrently, efforts should be made to reduce the income disparity between urban and rural areas and within the rural population itself, aiming to achieve shared prosperity. Specifically, this entails three key initiatives: first, promoting the healthy development of various rural industries, thereby enhancing farmers' income through industrial revitalization; second, increasing employment opportunities for the vast number of farmers and improving the employability of the rural workforce, thereby augmenting income through employment; third, actively exploring means to integrate more rural productive factors into the market, thereby increasing the property-related income of the broader farming community.

3. Enhancing the Compensation for Cadres in Rural Autonomous Organizations

Firstly, it is proposed to elevate the remuneration of village cadres, to align it with the salary standards of public institutions and to increase the fiscal budget for rural autonomous organizations. Additionally, the

introduction of performance-based rewards is advocated, so as to provide wage incentives based on work performance and achievements. Secondly, the promotion pathways for cadres in rural autonomous organizations should be streamlined to offer them broader prospects for development. Thirdly, efforts should be made to alleviate the additional burdens borne by cadres in rural autonomous organizations. This involves reducing the myriad of tasks and targets assigned by the grassroots government, so that village cadres can engage more deeply with the community, establish firm roots in rural areas and effectively serve the populace.

4.3 Enhancing Cultural Foundations in Rural Areas

1. Reshaping Public Culture in the Countryside

Firstly, there is a need to inherit and promote the exemplary traditional rural culture. Emphasis should be placed on leveraging the edifying function of outstanding traditional rural culture in shaping values and ideological concepts. Within the extensive history of the Chinese nation, many elements of exceptional traditional culture have been preserved, among which the exemplary traditional rural culture constitutes a significant component. The long-standing agricultural civilization has nurtured a precious spiritual root system for human civilization. On one hand, efforts should be made to unearth the cultural heritage inherent in rural traditions, with different regions organizing resources to explore this heritage through village histories, local chronicles or stories of local worthies. On the other hand, these valuable rural cultural heritages should be creatively integrated into the modern rural daily life, so as to give full play to their deserved instructional and guiding functions.

Secondly, the establishment of a rural cultural system with distinctive Chinese characteristics is essential. First of all, accelerating cultural transformation and fostering cultural innovation is critical. As the primary force in rural culture, farmers should be encouraged to play a pivotal role to develop a public culture that they can consciously pursue and actively participate in. Subsequently, increasing investment in rural cultural infrastructure is

vital. This involves augmenting fiscal funding for rural cultural development, increasing financial input, and constructing cultural facilities such as cultural centers, libraries, and cultural stations, thereby enhancing the accessibility of public cultural services. Finally, the cultivation of a cadre of cultural talents in rural areas is of utmost importance. Focusing on nurturing a rural cultural talent pool and encouraging them to create cultural works that are well-received and enjoyed by villagers is crucial. This, in turn, can subtly influence and inspire the broader farming community.

2. Advancing the Development of a Culture Rooted in the Rule of Law

It is imperative to focus on cultivating among the vast rural population a deep understanding of their rights and responsibilities, an awareness of equality and a sense of citizenship. Education and guidance are essential in encouraging the broader farming community to trust in the law, respect the law, and rely on legal frameworks for the resolution of issues.

Firstly, there should be a unification of institutions and a strengthening of leadership. It is imperative to delineate the responsible entities for the construction of a legal culture in rural areas and to implement the specific duties of relevant stakeholders, thereby providing organizational support for the development of legal culture initiatives. Secondly, the establishment of a regularized, professional, and vocational cadre of legal education personnel is essential. On the one hand, this involves elevating the legal literacy of current personnel through multiple channels while prioritizing the selection and absorption of outstanding talents with a background in legal studies into the grassroots legal education workforce. On the other hand, it is feasible to introduce quality legal service personnel into rural areas through societal engagement, exploring novel paths for legal aid and legal education dissemination, so as to fulfill the diverse legal needs of the rural populace. Thirdly, it is crucial to amplify the legal education outreach in rural areas to ensure its effective implementation while focusing

on innovating the forms of legal education and expanding its content. This approach should integrate rural legal education with the resolution of issues that are of utmost concern, direct relevance and practical significance to the rural population, encompassing hot spots and challenging matters. Fourthly, there must be a commitment to civilized and impartial law enforcement. This will enable the broader rural population to experience the fairness and justice of the judicial system within an equitable legal environment, feel the power of law, and thus establish faith and identification with the rule of law and legal systems. Finally, encouragement and guidance should be given to establish substantial legal service platforms in rural areas, such as setting up legal service studios at the village committee level or constructing legal service network platforms aimed at farmers. These platforms, based on their physical presence, should form an effective and enduring mechanism for legal services.

4.4 Improving Social Foundations in Rural Areas

1. Promoting the Revitalization of Rural Education

First and foremost, it is necessary to amplify investment in rural education. This entails reforming the national educational funding system to increase the financial support allocated to rural regions, aimed at enhancing the educational environment and facilities in these areas. Concurrently, indirect augmentation of educational investment can be achieved by alleviating the educational burdens in rural areas, particularly by increasing the proportion of reductions and exemptions for impoverished regions and families, coupled with an escalation in government subsidies. Additionally, significant emphasis should be placed on the integration of societal forces into the educational system. Encouraging active participation from social organizations and individuals in rural education is essential. This approach is intended to transform the current state of reliance solely on government investment in education in rural locales, thereby expanding the avenues for acquiring educational funds and resources.

Secondly, there should be an improvement in the

educational structure to form a diversified cultivation system. In the context of rapid societal development, it is imperative to shift from a monolithic value orientation in rural education to guiding it towards a diversified developmental trajectory. The ultimate goal is to establish an educational system capable of nurturing a diverse array of talents who are attuned to the realities of rural society and can contribute to its development. Specifically, this entails: first, the reinforcement of foundational education is essential to lay a solid and comprehensive groundwork for talent reserves that can invigorate rural areas; second, there should be a vigorous advancement of vocational and technical education to cultivate talents for new industries and business models in rural regions; third, enhancing adult education is crucial to improve the employability and competitive edge of the existing workforce, thereby augmenting their capacity to earn higher remuneration.

2. Alleviating the Disintegration of Rural Society

Firstly, the focus should be on mitigating the phenomena of rural hollowing-out and dispersion. It is essential to address the unilateral flow of talent and population from rural areas and cultivate modern rural residents who are inclined to stay emotionally, physically and fundamentally rooted in their communities. Initially, this requires establishing mechanisms to encourage talents to return to rural areas, attracting exceptional individuals to become outstanding rural cadres as well as modern, exemplary professional farmers. Subsequently, narrowing the gap between urban and rural public service systems is crucial. The disparity in public services between urban and rural areas is a significant factor contributing to the loss of talents; thus, enhancing the public service infrastructure in rural areas can effectively mitigate this issue. Finally, breaking free from the constraints of the dual urban-rural population policy is imperative. Institutional barriers hindering the movement of urban populations to rural areas also restrict the educational advancement of rural populations and are a significant factor of the outward flow of rural talents. It is necessary to address these barriers at the systemic level, to facilitate the free flow and

interchange of talents between urban and rural areas.

Secondly, this study emphasizes the enhancement of social cohesion within rural communities and the improvement of collective efficacy. The initial approach involves the amelioration of the physical infrastructure in rural areas. By continually upgrading the hardware and sanitary conditions in these regions, the subjective well-being of rural inhabitants can be elevated, thereby igniting their sense of belonging and responsibility towards their villages. Subsequently, the establishment of comprehensive community institutions in rural areas is advocated to foster the development of social organizations within these communities. On the one hand, this includes meeting the diverse needs of the rural populace by encouraging the formation of a variety of cultural, sports, and medical institutions, thereby augmenting the vibrancy of the community. On the other hand, it involves strengthening the awareness of cooperative governance in villages and promoting the healthy and orderly development of rural social organizations. Additionally, this thesis underscores the importance of supporting vulnerable groups, thereby enhancing the collective consciousness and cohesion among villagers. This approach aims to mitigate the issues of individualism, self-interest and disorganization prevalent in rural settings, and to reinforce the sense of community and cooperative spirit among the residents. Lastly, the significance of local conventions and villagers' agreements is highlighted. The role of these conventions and agreements in resolving internal family conflicts, regulating the social order of village life and fostering a positive community spirit is considered to be of utmost importance.

3. Enhancing the Effectiveness of Rural Social Security

Firstly, the thesis advocates for the perfection of the social security system. The initial measure involves the consolidation and expansion of social security projects within rural communities. This includes exploring ways to dismantle the dual urban-rural structure of

social security, incrementally increasing the range of social security projects available to rural residents, and addressing any deficiencies within these projects. The objective is to ensure that the broader rural populace can fully benefit from the national social security provisions. Meanwhile, the thesis underscores the need to enhance the management system of rural social security. This includes, on one hand, strengthening the capabilities and competencies of personnel involved in rural social security. On the other hand, it emphasizes the fortification of the operational and management aspects of the rural social security system, along with the establishment of a comprehensive supervisory framework, to ensure the effective implementation of social security measures.

Secondly, the thesis proposes the elevation of the level of social security in rural areas. This entails, on one side, not only the improvement of the security system but also the intensification of protection efforts and the increasing of the allocation of resources towards rural social security. It advocates for augmented state financial contributions in fundamental sectors such as healthcare, education, elderly care and housing, with a gradual enhancement of the security standards. Concurrently, it suggests the exploration and expansion of funding sources and the establishment of a financing mechanism for rural social security funds. On the other side, the thesis emphasizes the need to enhance the quality of social security services. This involves implementing targeted social aid and support measures to reduce the excessive dependency of certain individuals on government assistance. The goal is to achieve a more tailored approach to social relief and assistance, thereby improving the effectiveness of support provided to those in need.

4. Strengthening the Construction of Rural Public Security Governance System

Firstly, the thesis advocates for the advancement of the "Peaceful Village" initiative, aimed at purifying the public security environment in rural areas. The overall state of public order in rural communities inevitably influences the emergence and proliferation of criminal

activities and organized crime at the grassroots level. To combat this, the thesis proposes strengthening the integrated management and joint defense system for rural public order. This involves establishing a rapidly responsive platform for public security incidents, to create an environment where illegal and criminal behaviors are universally condemned. Such measures are intended to effectively deter criminal elements, particularly those involved in organized crime, thereby significantly enhancing the safety and security of rural communities.

Secondly, the thesis underscores the need for the refinement of the crime governance system. On one side, it calls for a transformation in governance philosophy, so as to recognize that most cost-effective policy choice lies in conducting effective prevention and addressing issues at their root. This involves understanding the importance of eradicating the conditions that foster the growth and development of criminal and evil forces. On the other side, there is a recommendation to move away from predominantly campaign-style governance models, advocating instead for a more diversified and multi-faceted approach to crime governance. This suggests the adoption of various levels and methods in addressing criminal activities, thus enabling a more comprehensive and effective system for crime prevention and control.

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