



Exploring the Source and Countermeasure of Mental Poverty in the Process of Targeted Poverty Alleviation¹

—Based on the perspective of the poor farmers

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Abstract: In the process of targeted poverty alleviation, the subjectivity of poor farmers is not only the internal driving force of poverty alleviation, but also the value of targeted poverty alleviation. The lack of subjectivity of poor farmers poses obvious obstacles and challenges to the process of getting rid of poverty. It will also greatly affect the actual results of poverty alleviation. The reasons for the lacking subjectivity of poor farmers are multidimensional. Among them, “mental poverty” is the primary cause, “mental poverty” mainly presents with the conservative ideas of the poor people, insufficient ambition and ambiguous goals in life.” Only mental poverty alleviation and material poverty alleviation play roles at the same time with benign interaction, reshaping the subjectivity of poor farmers, their strong desire and endogenous motivation to get rich can be activated and encouraged to take the initiative to shoulder the main responsibility of getting rid of poverty. As a proper meaning of poverty alleviation, mental poverty alleviation is a systematic project, which requires both “helping the heart and helping the mind” and “supporting the knowledge and supporting the education” to cultivate the endogenous motivation of the poor and stimulate the self-consciousness and independence of the poor farmers, improving the initiative and creativity to make poor famers self-reliant, and laying a solid foundation for fighting against poverty.

Key words: Targeted poverty alleviation; poor farmers; subjectivity; mental poverty alleviation; endogenous motivation

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Problem and Literature Review

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China's poverty alleviation work has made decisive progress. More than 60 million poor people have been lifted out of poverty, and the poverty incidence rate has dropped from 10.2% to less than 4%. [1] Economist Amartya Sen believes that China's poverty reduction achievement is the main reason for the significant decline in poverty rates worldwide.[2] The World Bank stated that "If there is a country that can become a model for eradicating extreme poverty, then it is likely to be China." [3]

At the same time, in the targeted poverty alleviation work in some places, the poverty alleviation targets (poor farmers) are only regarded as the objects of poverty alleviation, failing to fully stimulate their subjectivity, which causes some of them to "wait for assistance", even to strive to be "poor households", hindering the process of poverty alleviation to a certain extent. The successful experience of the Chinese revolution, socialist construction, and reform and opening up tells us that "The farmers, as the main body of the countryside, are the most active factors in rural productivity and the promoters of rural social progress." [4] If we want to advance poverty alleviation work in depth development, we must "regard farmers as the main body of history and political actors." [5] In other words, we should fully mobilize the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of poor farmers, "regard adhering to their main status and enhancing the welfare of famers as the starting point and the foothold of all work in the countryside." [6] Only in this way, rural poverty can be eliminated from the root causes, achieving long-term prosperity for poor farmers.

i. Overview of research on targeted poverty alleviation

In recent years, some scholars in China have conducted in-depth research on targeted poverty alleviation and have achieved abundant theoretical results. However, the existing research mainly focuses on the basic connotation, successful experience, practical dilemma, and promotion path of targeted poverty alleviation, and lacks due attention to the subjectivity of poor farmers.

First, when defining the connotation of targeted poverty alleviation, it only discusses from the aspects of precise identification, precise assistance, precise management and precise assessment, [7] rarely involves the subjective problems of poor farmers.

Second, some scholars have promoted successful cases in some places to a certain poverty alleviation model, in order to provide experience for other areas in poverty alleviation work, [8] but rarely talked about the subjectivity of poor farmers.

Third, when discussing the plight of targeted poverty alleviation practice, the researchers believe that it is mainly reflected in the identification of poverty alleviation objects, precise assistance and performance evaluation of poverty alleviation. Among them, the identification of poverty alleviation objects mainly includes aiming deviation [9], elite capture [10], and the lack of scientific identification standards; precise assistance has problems such as scale exclusion, insufficient coordination of poverty alleviation subjects, and inadequate assessment mechanism for assistance project cadres; [11] as for poverty alleviation performance assessment, it is difficult to measure fairness and efficiency, and the combination of qualitative and quantitative assessment is insufficient. The assessment method also lacks universal applicability. [12]

Fourth, on the path of promoting targeted poverty alleviation, researchers have suggested that it is necessary to improve the precise identification mechanism [9], accelerate policy support and institution innovation [13], enhance the assessment mechanism, and focus on grassroots governance innovation [14]. But the subjectivity of poor farmers is seldom mentioned.

In short, scholars mostly are in the position of "others" such as the state (central government), local governments, assistance enterprises, and social organizations, mainly from the perspective of "interpretation of connotation" or "policy effect and problem countermeasures" to explore the targeted poverty alleviation, and lack sufficient attention and systematic analysis of the mentality, thinking, subjective consciousness and initiative and creativity of poor farmers. Whether from a practical perspective or a theoretical level, exploring the subjectivity of poor farmers in the field of targeted poverty alleviation can enrich



the research contents in this field to a certain extent.

ii. Research space for mental poverty alleviation

Many facts tell us that without a good mental state and an active sense of poverty alleviation, we cannot fundamentally mobilize the subjective initiative in poverty alleviation. [15] “One of the root causes of poverty in poverty-stricken areas is mental poverty, weak will, and outdated ideas.” [16] Mental poverty alleviation has become a new field in the urgent poverty alleviation, corresponding to the “target” of “targeted poverty alleviation”. Mental poverty alleviation can play an irreplaceable non-material role. [17] In real life, mental poverty alleviation has become a topic that is often discussed in the field of poverty alleviation. It often appears in news reports, reflection and feelings of poverty alleviation, but academic research on mental poverty alleviation still needs to be strengthened and the existing achievement fails to scientifically explain and uncover the “black box” of “mental poverty.” It can be seen that “mental poverty alleviation” is not only a policy problem, but also a difficult problem in academic research. [18] Specifically, when news reports and related reflection refer to “mental poverty alleviation”, its core proposition can be summarized as “guiding targeted poverty alleviation through mental poverty alleviation”; In the relevant researches in the academic world, though “mental poverty alleviation” is consistently considered as the shortcoming of the current targeted poverty alleviation work and the inevitable trend in the future, few people have conducted in-depth discussions on its connotation and implementation path. Most of the researchers have cited General Secretary Xi Jinping’s arguments and assertions on “mental poverty alleviation” to support their own arguments. There seems no inevitable logical relationship between the subjectivity of poor farmers and mental poverty alleviation, but in reality, there is a “match point” between them, namely the “mental poverty”. Because the subjectivity has not been fully stimulated, some poor farmers have formed a serious “waiting for assistance” idea, which is the main manifestation of mental poverty. The basic meaning of mental poverty alleviation is to intervene in the subjective world of the poor, fully mobilizing and exerting the self-motivation of the poor, then embarking on a path of becoming rich through getting rid of poverty on their own. [19] That is to say, mental poverty alleviation is aimed at how to change the “mental

poverty” of poor farmers and the problem of insufficient endogenous motivation. We need awaken their willingness to get rich, boosting their self-confidence and self-reliance, activating their endogenous motivation, and giving full play to their own enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity to achieve targeted poverty alleviation.

II. Poor Farmers’ Subjectivity: Another Perspective on Examining Targeted Poverty Alleviation

According to the interpretation of Marxism, “The subject of understanding and transforming the world, is a real individual and a real human being.” [20] Of course, not all people are or always become the subject. Only those individuals and social groups that “have mind and thoughts while engaging in social practice activities and cognitive activities” [21] are regarded as “subjects”. Thus, subjectivity can be understood as “the presupposition of subjects such as independence, initiative, creativity, and purpose in the practice of interaction between subjects and objects.” [22] That is, subjectivity is not only unique to human beings, but only occurs when people take the initiative to recognize and transform objects. The corresponding object is “the object of practice and understanding activities.” [23] Therefore, the subjectivity of poor farmers in the field of targeted poverty alleviation refers to the independence, self-consciousness, initiative and creativity, from which they can show their grasp and manifestation of the unity and regularity in the poverty alleviation. Among them, independence, that is, independence, refers to the attitude, ability, basic rights or characteristics of the subject in his interaction with the subject and object according to his willingness. [24] The independence of poor farmers, that is, their self-awareness and independent personality when they start their own businesses or participate in poverty alleviation projects and get rid of poverty. Consciousness means that when poor farmers participate in poverty alleviation affairs or projects, they consciously regard themselves as “initiatives” and realize that they are not only the beneficiaries of poverty alleviation, but also the main force for poverty alleviation. The enthusiasm of poor farmers means that they should consciously regulate their own emotional awareness and practical activities, and they are not solely influenced by the outside or others, as well as the fate. Creativity refers to the innovative spirit, creative ability and achievements of the poor farmers in order to change



their own destiny and to improve the material and cultural life of their family.

The reason why we look at the targeted poverty alleviation from the perspective of the poor farmers' subjectivity is because stimulating their subjectivity is not only the inherent requirement of targeted poverty alleviation, but also the key "acting point". Poor farmers know best where poverty is, where the difficulty is, and why it is poor. Therefore, it is necessary to "respect the status of subject in poverty alleviation and return the initiative of poverty alleviation to the poor. All kinds of poverty alleviation projects and poverty alleviation activities should be closely carried out around the needs of the poor, supporting them to explore innovative poverty alleviation ways." [25]

i. The subjectivity of the poor farmers is the internal driving force of targeted poverty alleviation

Marxist materialist dialectics believes that "the development of things is determined by internal factors." Internal factors are the factors that are decisive, and external factors are only the conditions for change. In other words, if poor farmers want to completely get rid of poverty and achieve sustainable development, it is impossible to only rely on the "peripheral" forces of the government, society and other poverty alleviation subjects, and they must rely on the "endogenous power" of themselves to get rid of poverty. Nobel Peace Prize winner Yunus believes that the poor are trustworthy and respectful. Anti-poverty must respect the subjectivity of the poor and carry out appropriate institutional reforms. [26] Similarly, in the work of targeted poverty alleviation, poor farmers should be regarded as an important force to fight against poverty. Only by exerting their subjectivity, stimulating their endogenous motivation, strengthening their willingness to fight against poverty, and realizing that getting rid of poverty and getting rich are their own business, will they actively participate in targeted poverty alleviation. Otherwise, they will consciously or unconsciously "keep out of the business."

The Outline of China's Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development (2011-2020) proposes that "Giving full play to the initiative and creativity of poverty-stricken areas and poverty

alleviation targets, respect the subject of poverty-relief targets, improve their self-management level and development capabilities, and build on their own to achieve poverty alleviation. ". [27] The Decision on Winning the Fight against Poverty issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasizes "Holding on the subject of the masses and stimulating endogenous motivation." At the 2015 Central Poverty Alleviation and Development Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that "Getting rid of poverty and getting rich will ultimately depend on the poor people to achieve with their hard work." [28]

American scholar Michael Sheridan proposed that in the anti-poverty activity, it is closely linked to the poor through responsibility sharing. Even with a low level of responsibility sharing, this is also important for the poor. [29] This has been confirmed by the "Saemaul Undong" in Korea. At the beginning of the "Saemaul Undong", in response to the "waiting for assistance" idea that prevailed among poor peasants, then South Korean President Park Chung-hee insisted that "The government assistance is only available to those who can help themselves" [30] to inspire the independence and initiative of poor farmers, awaken their main consciousness of building a beautiful home, thus achieving the successful experience of the "Saemaul Undong".

Therefore, in targeted poverty alleviation, the intrinsic motivation of poor farmers to get rid of poverty and get rich must be motivated, so that they can understand that "happiness will not fall from the sky", and relying on external aid and relief will continue to be poor rather than getting rich. Only by respecting their subject status, returning the initiative to poverty alleviation, stimulating their independence, initiative and creativity, and urging them to realize the ideological change from "I am asked to get rid of poverty" to "I want to get rich", the quality of poverty alleviation can be ensured.

ii. The subjectivity of poor farmers is the value of targeted poverty alleviation

Targeted poverty alleviation is a poverty alleviation way to precisely identify, assist and manage poverty alleviation targets in response to different poverty-stricken areas and



households. [31] When General Secretary Xi Jinping investigated poverty alleviation work in Guizhou Province, he summarized his main connotations as: “The object should be precise, the project should be precise, the use of funds should be precise, the measures should be precise, and the person sent to villages should be precise and the effectiveness of poverty alleviation should be precise.” [32] The ultimate goal or value of the six “precision” is how to better stimulate the subjectivity of poor farmers, and then give them the decision-making, use and control of poverty alleviation resources. Targeted poverty alleviation will eventually have to achieve the effect through the independence and self-consciousness of poor farmers. Otherwise, it will only “pipette tip doesn’t move and the barrel moves” .

Amartya Sen stressed that “The beneficiaries are regarded as the subject rather than the passive receiver... The selected object is active and can make the result selected by object different from attempt selected by the object.” [33] Similarly, if the self-awareness and independence of the poor are not motivated, even if they are accurately identified and the poverty alleviation resources are accurately distributed, while the assistants and village cadres are also devoted, and the targeted poverty alleviation is still possible to only become a vision of willingness. In addition, in the targeted poverty alleviation work in some areas, some paired or resident assistants wear the “colored glasses” and do not respect the subject status of poor farmers. When carrying out poverty alleviation work, they only regard them as objects of poverty alleviation rather than subjects and even as a tool for poverty alleviation, consciously or unconsciously deciding the design of poverty alleviation programs and the choice of poverty alleviation projects for the poor, which makes the protagonists and supporting roles of poverty alleviation misplaced, undermining the independence, initiative and creativity of poor farmers to get rid of poverty and become rich. And effort of poverty alleviation work is halved.

“The real poverty alleviation is to activate a huge stock in small increments, which is a process to help the poor to improve ‘independence’ .” [34] It is because the relevant parties and some assistants do not pay attention to the “ambition poverty” of some poor farmers and do not provoke their consciousness and initiative, thus the extreme cases that poor farmers eat the poverty-stricken food seeds, poverty-stricken animals such as

chickens, ducks and geese, or exchange them for alcohols appear in the news.

iii. Giving full play to the subjectivity of poor farmers to boost targeted poverty alleviation

Practice has proved that if the subjectivity of poor farmers is effectively stimulated, the initiative and creativity of self-reliance and conscious poverty alleviation will be fully exerted, and the “main melody” of everyone participating in poverty alleviation will be formed, thus achieving the effectiveness of poverty alleviation with half the effort.

First, giving play to the independence of poor farmers can enhance the endogenous motivation to fight against poverty. If the independence of poor farmers is brought into play, they will consciously abandon all kinds of dependence idea and will be self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-reliance, relying on their diligent hands and ingenuity to get rid of poverty and become rich, thus promoting the process of poverty alleviation. On the contrary, there may be a phenomenon of “enjoy sunbathing against the wall and wait for others to send a moderately prosperous life to them” .

Second, giving full play to the self-consciousness of poor farmers is conducive to the implementation of poverty alleviation policies. Once there is a strong sense of self-consciousness, poor farmers will become “actively participate” from “passively involved” in the process of targeted poverty alleviation, and change from “make me do” as “I want to do” . When their initiative and the assistance from the outside converge into a force, not only the pace of poverty alleviation can be sped up, but also the return to poverty can be effectively prevented. However, if there is a lack of self-awareness, poor farmers will “wait for poverty alleviation” and show an indifferent attitude towards poverty alleviation, which leads to the dislocation of “cadres work and the masses watch” .

Third, the activation of the farmers’ enthusiasm can encourage them to participate in poverty alleviation. Through the resonance of its own “activeness” and external “linkage” , the melody of getting rid of poverty and becoming rich has played the notes of victory in fighting against poverty. On the contrary, if lacking initiative, some poor farmers will become



dawdlers, and only be satisfied with a full-fledged life with a little expense. For example, the government has built a greenhouse for some poor households, but they still wait the government to buy seeds and fertilizer, and even grass curtains for them. [35]

Fourth, mobilizing the creativity of poor farmers can speed up the process of getting rid of poverty. If the creativity of poor farmers is brought into play, they will not only have rational analysis and creative suggestions for their own poverty alleviation, but also adopt new thinking and new methods to solve the problems and challenges that they encounter in the process of poverty alleviation. While surpassing and elevating themselves, they also explore the path of poverty alleviation in line with their own reality. In reality, long-term poverty has made some farmers lack the courage to develop and innovate. When choosing poverty alleviation projects, they often become overcautious and indecisive and are unwilling to take risks. For example, when assistant cadres mobilize them to feed pigs to become rich, a poor farmer ask, “What if the pig is sick? If it dies, can you cover the loss?” [36]

III. Mental poverty: the intrinsic factor of the lack of subjectivity of the poor farmers

The reasons for the lack of subjectivity of poor farmers are complex. Researchers generally believe that there are both the influence of multiple social factors and the subjective reasons of poor farmers, and mental poverty has always been the subjective primary source. [37]

“Mental poverty refers to the mental status that the mental state, value orientation, life concept and other mental states, such as human mentality, values, habits and customs, cannot meet the needs of the real world, lag behind the mainstream life of the society, and are incompatible with or even contradicted by society. “ [38]

General Secretary Xi Jinping once said: “Poverty in one place is mainly poverty in two aspects. One is material poverty and the other is mental poverty.” [39] In comparison, “Mental-caused poverty” is more concealed and more disseminative than “Material-caused poverty” , and the passive social impact is also greater. “Mental poverty not only seriously affects people’ s sense of happiness, but also restricts the means and opportunities for poor

people to access social resources, thus deepening their relative poverty.” [38] Over time, mental poverty has reduced them desire to get rid of poverty and become rich, gradually losing the spiritual impetus to challenge the destiny of poverty. Therefore, when carrying out poverty alleviation, it is necessary to provide material assistance to poor farmers and help them achieve mental “poverty alleviation” at the same time. It is generally believed that the mental poverty of poor farmers is mainly manifested in three aspects, and these three aspects all lead to their lack of subjectivity.

i. Conservative ideas

Franklin once said: “Poverty itself is not terrible. It is terrible to think that it is destined to be poor or must die of poverty.” [40] There are many reports that some farmers seem to be economically poor, or with not enough food, or without shelters.... But by looking at the essence through the phenomenon, it will be found that the hidden behind is the backwardness of ideas and concepts as well as the conservative poverty conscious. The long-term poverty affliction has given them a strong sense of fatality. Most of them agree that “the rich are the gift from the former world, and people shall not pursue what is destined not to be theirs.” Their own poverty is often attributed to the arrangement of heaven and blamed for the illusory fate. In this way, many people lack self-determination and self-consciousness. They are not thinking and changing the poor status, but take the government help and social assistance with a natural attitude.

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in the Getting rid of poverty that due to mental poverty, some poor farmers “happy to have a poor life” , “poor and free” , “wait, rely, and ask” , [41] basically have no initiative to get rid of poverty and get rich. For this reason, the poverty alleviation work in some places has finally become a “one-man show” of government departments, support units, and cadres in villages, and there has been a strange phenomenon of “the cadres are in full swing and the masses are watching.” In addition, due to the constraints of traditional small farmers’ ideas and lifestyles, some poor farmers lack initiative and creativity, are afraid of taking risks, and unwilling to try and accept new things. They also slowly respond to economic development and social changes, and



have no attitude of self-employment and self-reliance. And the more help you provide to the poor, the poorer they become. Therefore, inspiring poor farmers to get rid of poverty and become self-sufficient and exerting their independence, initiative and creativity, have become the primary task of getting rid of poverty.

ii. Ambition deficiency in poverty alleviation

As the old saying goes, “People can live an insufficient life but the ambition cannot.” At the same time, people cannot have no ambitions. Whether it is for the poor farmers themselves or their family, if there is ambition, everything can be done; if there is no ambition, nothing can be done. “The tendency of the ambition is not far from the end, and whether the mountains or the sea, they cannot be the limitation.” [42] There is a relationship with lack of ambition why some farmers cannot get rich after receive the help and assistance. The philosopher Wang Yangming said: “There is nothing to be done in the world if you don’t have the ambition. Although there are lots of skills in the world, all of them start from the ambition.” [43] General Secretary Xi Jinping once pointed out that for getting rid of poverty, “The primary significance is not poverty alleviation in materials, but to get rid of the ‘poverty’ of consciousness and thinking.” [41] If poor farmers lack the ambition to get rid of poverty and become the self-confidence of getting rich, they will exhaust the power of running a well-off society from the bottom of their hearts. Even if the state and society give them more material help, they can only solve the problem of being trapped for one time, but cannot be unplugged the “Poor roots” for a long time. Besides that, they will also unconsciously deny their initiative and creativity, accept various forms of “poverty relief”, and even take pride in being poor and ask for money and materials.

It has been reported that some poor farmers “rely on the poor status” to threaten the assistance cadres in the village. “You have signed a military order for poverty alleviation with your leader. If you fail to achieve the goal, you will be punished.” [44] It shows that for some poor farmers, “wait, rely, and ask” has become a path of dependence, and “not looking forward to the head” has become a normal life. For this situation, General Secretary Xi Jinping specifically pointed out that “As the saying goes, saving the poor but not saving

the lazy guys. Poor is terrible, but it is more terrible to live relying on the poor life. Without poverty alleviation ambition, more poverty alleviation funds can only be used for a short time. “[45] If poor farmers want to get rid of poverty completely, they must rely on their own efforts and creation to achieve it. The government support policies and external support are only “external causes.” If poor farmers lose their ambition and self-confidence to get rid of poverty, even if they have been helped for many years, they may still be poor and even fall into the vicious circle of “poverty resulting in reliance, reliance resulting in laziness, and laziness resulting in poverty” .

iii. Obscure life goals

Engels believes: “People create their own history through the pursuit of his own, consciously desired purpose.” [46] With clear goals and beliefs, people will have a pursuit in life, it is not easy to get lost. It is undeniable that most poor farmers have clear targets for production and life, but there are also very few people who suffer from the long-term influence of poverty culture, lacking independence and consciousness, doing nothing at all and living an idle life. Once the village cadres come to encourage them to work hard, get rich, or start a business, they emphasize that they are sick, poor, having no technology, no way, no ability, and rarely find reasons from their own thoughts. In their view, the assistance from the government, social organizations and other poverty alleviation subjects, together with the subsidies of the state preferential policies for farmers, can maintain their basic life, so they lay asleep on the name of “poor households” for all day.

“Waiting for relief food in spring, and waiting other winter clothing in winter, never leaving the house during the hot summer and cool autumn”, and even relying on the “poor” to be arrogant. In order to meet their own improper requirements, they will threaten or hinder the targeted poverty alleviation work. As Ingles said, “Lagging behind and underdevelopment are not just a bunch of statistical indicators that outline the socio-economic picture, but also a state of mind.” [47] Therefore, if poor farmers lack clear goals in life, without abandoning the idea of “wait, rely and ask”, and without actively giving full play to their independence and initiative, even if the government, social organizations and other poverty alleviation



bodies help them for a lifetime, they may still be “poor even with poverty alleviation for years.” Because “most of the poverty in the world is a morbid state, as the result of bad life, bad environment, bad thoughts.” [48]

In summary, poverty is manifested both in the material life and in the mental level. Among them, mental poverty will not only affect the enrichment of the material life of poor farmers, but also often lead to different degrees of lack of subjectivity, thus becoming a more difficult “poverty roots” to be cut. Being helped for many years, some poor farmers are still “in poverty, not knowing why they are poor, and being lazy and incompetent with an idle life,” which has a great relationship with their lack of awareness and independence to challenge poverty and create new life. As scholars have said, “The poor cannot basically rely on their own strength to take advantage of the opportunity to get rid of the fate of poverty, because they have already internalized a set of values that are incompatible with the big society.” [49] Therefore, it is necessary to conduct “mental poverty alleviation for the poor” to consolidate and boost the effectiveness of “targeted poverty alleviation”. Only by helping some poor farmers to clear the stumbling blocks in the form of “ambition poverty”, “thinking poverty” and “consciousness poverty” on the road to poverty alleviation, and improving their “mental power”, can they truly “recognize their brilliance and have motivation of confidence, and self-respect to go ahead.” [41] The passive relief will become active poverty alleviation, thus achieving material and mental “common prosperity” to get rid of poverty and make a solid effect.

IV. Countermeasures for mental poverty

The ancient said: “There are specimens of the disease”, “The person who knows the specimen, can solve the problem in different forms; but if he does not know the specimen, it is a frenetic movement.” In view of the lacking subjectivity of some poor farmers in the field of poverty alleviation, it is necessary to find the cause and deal with it accordingly. In this regard, many cadres and researchers engaged in poverty alleviation point out that mental poverty is the primary source of subjectivity, and has a more fundamental, more essential and deeper impact on the lack of the subjectivity of poor farmers. Therefore, while carrying

out material poverty alleviation for poor farmers to “treat the superficial problem”, they should also carry out mental poverty alleviation to “cure the root cause.”

“Insulating with mental poverty is the strategic focus of Xi Jinping’s targeted poverty alleviation thinking.” [37] Since the 18th National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized that “helping the poor must first support their ambition” on a number of important occasions, important meetings, and important time points. For example, when he visited the poor people in Fuping, Hebei, in December 2012, he said, “As long as there is confidence, the land can become the gold”. [50] In the survey of poverty alleviation in Xiangxi in 2013, he proposed that “getting out of poverty and becoming rich is determined by ambition. If there is ambition and confidence, there will be no stagnation.” [51] In the keynote speech of the 2015 Forum on Poverty Reduction and Development, he pointed out that “Conducting poverty alleviation in both materials and ambition, mobilizing the enthusiasm of poverty alleviation, improving their development capabilities, and exerting their subject role.” [52] At the 2015 Central Poverty Alleviation and Development Work Conference, he stressed that “Poverty alleviation is not a charity relief. Instead, we must guide and support all those who have the ability to work and rely on their own hands to create a better tomorrow.” [53] The report of the 19th National Congress clearly stated that it should “Focusing on the combination of poverty alleviation and supporting ambition and education.” [1] It can be seen that helping poor farmers to unplug the “thinking roots”, reshaping their subjectivity, and avoiding the vicious circle of “poor” and “lazy”, “poor” and “stupid” are the key to conduct targeted poverty alleviation.

General Secretary Xi Jinping’s “mental poverty alleviation” is not to appear from the thin air, but “based on solid Marxist theory and is a summary and sublimation of our party’s experience in poverty alleviation and reduction over the years. It has a profound historical heritage” [15] and is the theoretical concise and sublimation of the “Ningde model” for poverty alleviation and development. When he was in charge of Ningde many years ago, during guiding the local poverty alleviation General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly pointed out “To help the poor, we must first support their ambition, and dilute the ‘poverty

consciousness’ from their mind. Do not mention poverty everywhere and every time.” [41] Nowadays, as a typical representative of mental poverty alleviation, the beneficial exploration of the “Ningde model” not only provides experience for poverty alleviation work in other regions, but also provides theoretical support for interpreting the practical value of mental poverty alleviation. It can be seen that mental poverty alleviation is not only an important subject in Xi Jinping’ s new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, but also a complex systematic project, which requires combination of supporting “ambition” and “education” with a “positive force” . That is, by changing the inner spiritual mechanism of poor farmers, stimulating their self-awareness and independence, and self-reliance, improving their initiative and creativity to make them self-reliant, the endogenous power of their own can be effectively relied on to win the fight against poverty.

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