

Modernity and Locality: Poverty Cultures in Severely Imprinted Areas and Their Solutions

Findings from Field Investigation of 5 Poor Villages in Zhaojue, Sichuan¹

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Abstract: Various poverty phenomena in severely impoverished areas are usually interpreted from two broad dimensions: economic–social structure and culture. In practical efforts, some cultural factors in such areas, especially minority communities, tend to be defined by the government as “Poverty Culture”, and addressed as such, so as to adapt to modern institutions.

However, in spite of wide recognition of merits of modernity of these practices, poverty–stricken areas and their residents, more often than not, tend to make logical dissection of some government–led anti–poverty moves targeting the poverty cultures based on their “local knowledge” and thus put up some outspoken resistance, rendering these anti–poverty policy measures ineffective or stalled. Based on the dual perspective of modernity and locality, it can be found that modernity and national power are a metaphor for each other, as a result, involvement and expansion of powers of state are sure to lay the key foundation for both tensions between merits of modernity and local cultures, and variations of local cultures. Therefore, only with dual consciousness of modernity and locality can effective problem–solving tactics for poverty cultures be worked out and instituted in place in the context of desired relationships.

Keywords: Modernity, Locality, Severely Impoverished Areas, Poverty Culture, Targeted Anti–Poverty

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1. Topics and Research Approaches

Since the reform and opening-up, China has made great achievements in its anti-poverty campaign, sharply reducing its overall poverty status. The poor population in the countryside has steadily shrunk from 770 million in 1978 to 16.6 million in 2018, with the poverty incidence sliding from 97.5% to 1.7%².

To promote the anti-poverty development and help farmers get out of poverty in poverty-stricken areas through economic growth and social progress have been the basic driving force behind China's rapid advance in poverty reduction, which has attracted the attention from around the world, and also the most valuable experience from China's unremitting poverty reduction practice[1]. Nowadays, China's poverty reduction has already entered the crucial sprint stage: maintaining and expanding gains from the past decades. So, to win a decisive victory in building an overall well-off society, our top priority is how to help severely impoverished areas get rid of poverty. Now, this issue has risen to be both the key to, and the centerpiece of, our nationwide ongoing campaign. Yet, given the diversity, the uniqueness and the complexity with local cultures and lifestyles in severely impoverished areas, especially the "3 regions and 3 prefectures" which are predominately inhabited by ethnic minorities, the daunting mission of alleviating poverty are fraught with more complex and steep challenges. In June 2018, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council of the Chinese Government issued the guidelines on the 3-year action plan to win the anti-poverty war, urging all participants to focus concerted efforts to help these severely impoverished areas (especially the "3 regions and 3 prefectures") go out of poverty by tackling their special difficulties, and putting forward the overall requirement of cracking the hardest

² The Household Survey Office of the National Bureau of Statistics: China's Rural Poverty Monitoring Report (2017), China Statistics Press, 2017, p. 1; Zhang Yi: National Rural Poor Population Shrank by 13.86 million in 2018, Guangming Daily, Feb. 17, 2019.

nuts in this mission through more effective moves, more solid work and more focused efforts.

In the context of increased national support for severely impoverished areas, how to effectively tackle poverty issues in severely impoverished areas? How to understand and treat with the evolutionary plights, and adaptive or creative transformations of local cultural habits, ethnic minority customs and lifestyles of poor residents in the process of poverty alleviation? In particular, how to respond to potential alignments and tensions between poverty cultures (which remain controversial both in theory and practice) on the one side and the goals and requirements of poverty eradication campaign on the other? In this Paper, we will try to give some theoretical explanations of these topics based on preliminary empirical findings from our field research.

Academic communities have looked into poverty issues related to severely impoverished areas and/or poor populations mainly from two perspectives: economic-social structure and culture. In the former, the researchers usually focus their eye on objective external conditions of being stuck in or leading to poverty, such as bad geographical and natural conditions, underdeveloped infrastructure, extremely low level of economic development, seriously backward basic social services, and lack of organizational and management resources [2], and then, put forward some corresponding recommendations at the policy level based on these external poverty factors. For example, Zuo Ting et al. believe that in order to deal with serious poverty, existing mechanisms of basic public service provision should be further improved in future, and innovative poverty reduction pathways of basic public service provision be explored so as to let public services play a greater role in tackling serious poverty" [3]. He Lilong et al. believe that "relocation of extremely poor residents out of severely impoverished areas is an important way to

solve the extreme poverty” [4]. Li Jinlong et al. point out that “to enhance governments’ governance capabilities in severely impoverished areas is key to pushing forward the effective implementation of targeted anti-poverty policies” [5]. There is no doubt that the improvement of these external conditions can effectively enhance the overall level of development and modernization of severely impoverished areas, but, looking from the realities of economic and social development, the improvement of external conditions does not eliminate all the issues of poverty, and such theories of only relying on economic and social development also lead to some negative consequences. For example, the financial anti-poverty policy design, which provided financial support in the form of soft micro-loans to poverty families’ businesses, nicknamed as “direct blood transfusions” to fuel the development of family businesses, resulted in the big predicament in practice of “government being willing to give while poverty families being reluctant to take” in most of severely impoverished areas [6], and even led to overly pro-rich effects [7]. Anti-poverty-oriented relocation, which is seen as an important move in overall improving objective external conditions for poor populations, often has the outcome of poor families remaining stuck in poverty after relocation in many places, and having much lower incomes than those of non-poverty families relocated in the same periods” [8], and even led to “daily backfire” in some resettlement communities in various places, with relocated poverty families launching collective struggle to return to their original residences [9].

In contrast to the mentioned-above interpretation approach, other scholars try to explain and reflect on poverty and its underlying topics from the perspective of cultures in severely impoverished areas and poor populations. However, even looking into poverty issues at the culture level, there are also heated debates due to various points of view, and accordingly various different judgments and arguments on the relationships between culture and poverty. The first is the doctrine of modernism or developmentalism, where the

concept: “poverty culture” is introduced to explain poverty issues of severely impoverished areas and poor populations.

The doctrine of poverty culture dated back to the U.S. sociologists and anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1960s, who pointed out in an article titled Poverty Culture that, as the label of an specific conceptual model, poverty culture is a social subculture having its own structural architecture and rationales, representing “in the context of an established history and society, a shared way of life for the poor different from mainstream cultures” , or to put it in other words, representing the collective adaptation of the poor, or response of the poor, to their marginalized status in a highly stratified and highly personalized society” [10]. At the level of the whole society, poverty culture takes shape as a kind of subculture; at the community level, largely as a special cultural phenomenon in slums; at the family level, as a loose family structure in a specific family relationship; and at the individual level, as personal thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, albeit reflecting a collective traits [11]. And thus, poverty culture can be presented at various levels, including a region, a group and an individual.

After the doctrine of poverty culture came into China, a comprehensive analysis and definition of poverty culture has been made by Chinese scholars. For example, Wu Licai believes that the so-called poverty culture is, in essence, a unique way of life among the poor, and is a collection of non-physical traits of groups of people who have long lived in poverty, including behavior patterns, habits, customs, psychological trends, mindsets, attitudes and values of life [12]. In severely impoverished areas, lack of modern ethics and long-term secession from modern commercial ethics of aspiring to be rich make the poor groups come across to outsiders as “lazy, sluggish and slow” and “waiting, being dependant and begging for excessive external

grants” , namely, a class of creatures with typical poverty culture traits” [13]. The structural dynamics from the interaction of symbolic signs, social norms, values and other elements of poverty culture usually render ineffective or stuck in a predicament government’ s targeted anti-poverty efforts to speed up modern transformation in severely impoverished areas [14].

However, overly emphasizing the doctrine of poverty culture, namely indiscriminate criticism of traditional endogenic local cultures in poor areas and among poor populations, especially minority cultures, from the perspective of modern external cultures, not only comes to biased epistemological conclusions, but also could not contribute to finding out effective solutions to poverty reduction. So, some scholars instead took from the points of view of locality or collectivism to reflect on the application of the doctrine of poverty culture in China, especially in minority areas. One conclusion from such reflection is that, besides a failure to take account of the influences of external pressures and structural factors on specific attitudes and behaviors of poor populations (15), many corollaries from the doctrine of poverty culture have stigmatized regional cultures or minority cultures, belittling unique resources in regional or minority cultures, and weakening the self-confidence of these cultures.

The other opinion drawn from the doctrine of collectivism culture criticizes the hegemony of national developmentalism implicitly embedded in the doctrine of poverty culture on minority cultures. National developmentalism tends to dissect and choose ethnic cultures based on economic development-oriented utilitarian criteria, not only fragmentating and objectifying ethnic cultures, but also degrading them into cultural pieces subject to being disassembled at will” and “tools for achieving national economic growth” (16). Yet, being easily prone to falling into the stereotype of “appreciation of distinctive life attitudes

in isolated small societies by cultural anthropology communities in history” , the doctrine of collectivism culture fails to look at poverty issues from in-depth links between regions and ethnic nationalities (ethnic groups), which both are in constant evolution over the course of modernization, and thus fails to respond to actual needs and demands from severely imbed areas and minority communities.

Inspired by the above literature sorting out, we have conducted an empirical investigation into poverty cultures and poverty reduction practices in severely impoverished areas and poor populations. In this Paper, we try to explore possible pathways of effectively getting out of “cultural dilemmas” and achieving sound governance in poverty reduction efforts from the dual perspective of modernity and locality.

2. Research Methods and Basic Information of Investigated Regions

(1) Research Methods

To better understand and research into poverty culture issues in severely impoverished areas in the ongoing poverty reduction drive, the author and his research team conducted a fact-finding investigation in the Yi ethnic Autonomous Prefecture of Liangshan in Sichuan (Liangshan, below for short), a typical severely impoverished area in southwestern China. On the one hand, through Sichuan Anti-poverty & Relocation Office and Liangshan Anti-poverty & Relocation Office, we collected as much as possible poverty reduction information (especially the materials related to poverty culture issues and poverty reduction governance practices in this prefecture), including policy documents, work summaries, situation reports, data statistics, typical cases and so on. On the other hand, we singled out Zhaojue County in Liangshan as our key investigated region. We conducted extensive discussions with

related departments in the county and in-depth interviews with related leaders or key participants in poverty reduction efforts to get idea of basic situation of the poverty culture and poverty reduction governance practices in the county. We also made field investigations in five villages (selecting randomly one village from each of five townships in Zhaojue), getting detailed and in-depth information of policy implementation, effectiveness, experience, difficulties and challenges related to poverty culture and its governance practices through focused discussions with township/village leaders, family interviews, fact-finding surveys, on-site observations, and other methods.

(2) Basic Information of the Investigated Region

Liangshan is the largest Yi ethnic settlement across the country, and also the region with the most ethnic nationalities and the largest minority population in Sichuan. Consisting of 16 counties and one city, its 60,400 sq.km administrative jurisdiction is home to 14 indigenous ethnics (incl. Yi, Han, Tibet, Hui, Mongolia and others), and Yi ethnic inhabitants make up 52.89% of its total population of 5.2129 million. The 1956 democratic reform fast-tracked Liangshan into a socialist society from the slave society in a skipping-across-centuries leap forward. Due to multiple constraints, such as natural and historical factors, Liangshan remains stuck in severe poverty. It is a well known region across the country in terms of the seriousness of poverty, the complexity of poverty causes and the difficulty in getting rid of poverty.

By the first half of 2018, 41,600 sq.km of continuous zones in the Prefecture suffered from severe poverty, and 491,000 poor residents clustered in 1,118 severe poor villages in 11 ethnic minority-dominated counties, with the poverty incidence being up to 11%. In sharp contrast with the 6 resource-rich, booming counties in “A” river basin, these 11 poor counties struggled in unbalanced and inadequate development, showing especially obvious characteristics

of severe poverty. Due to its persistent and glaring overall regional poverty, it has been listed among “3 regions and 3 prefectures” of severe poverty by China’s Central Government, and has been the main battlefield of both provincial and national anti-poverty pushes.

Therefore, in the Implementation Opinions on the 3-Year Action Plan to Win the Anti-poverty Campaign unveiled in 2018, the Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Government of Sichuan required that more focused efforts must be made to accomplish the mission of “lifting severely impoverished areas across the province out of poverty”, and, to this end, made a series of important arrangements, including 34 policy measures in 12 major fields, for example, “to implement targeted policies specific to local realities and to provide comprehensive supports to help Liangshan win a landslide victory over poverty”, “to facilitate industrial employment” and “to develop education, medical services, health care and the likes”.

Tucked in Liangshan’s hinterlands and covering an area of 2,700 sq.km., Zhaojue county consists of 836 agro-pastoral collective teams in 271 administrative villages in 47 townships, and has a total population of 32.0 million, with Yi ethnic residents making up 98.2%. Being a county with the largest Yi ethnic population across the country, it has many distinctive features: poor infrastructure, a weak economic basis, and a lower level of development. It is both a concentrated enclave of numerous ethnic nationalities and a severely impoverished area, and thus, has been the key county of the nation’s anti-poverty and economic promotion drive.

The basic facts of the 5 villages in the county we conducted field investigations in are shown as in the following table.

Table 1: Basic Facts of 5 Villages in Z County

Villages	A	B	C	D	E
Distance From the Site of County/Prefecture	48/52 K.m.	38/61 K.m.	26/126 K.m.	36/136.2 K.m.	32/132 K.m.
Administrative Area/ Average Altitude	9.12 sq.km./2,700 m	22 sq.km./2,620 m	7.81 sq.km./2,300 m	8.2 sq.km./2,635 m	6.2 sq.km./2,450 m
Teams/Households/ Residents	2 teams/172 households/706 residents	5 teams/490 households/1,892 residents	3 teams/191 households/865 residents	2 teams/124 households/592 residents	2 teams/183 households/812 residents
Ethnic Groups	All the Yi ethnic inhabitants	All the Yi ethnic inhabitants	All the Yi ethnic inhabitants	All the Yi ethnic inhabitants	All the Yi ethnic inhabitants
Book-building Households/Residents	74 households/182 residents	93 households/351 residents	63 households/326 residents	68 households/339 residents	41 households/155 residents
Poverty Incidence	33.7%	18.55%	37.68%	57.36%	19%
Cultivated Lands/Forest Lands/Grass Lands	3,000/2,770/7,200 mu	2,530/684.6/850 mu	905.48/1,300/6,000 mu	1,164.84/2,370/4,960 mu	736.76/806/0 mu
Farming Crops	Potatoes, Buckwheat, Oats	Potatoes, Buckwheat, Oats	Potatoes, Corn, Buckwheat, Oats	Tartary Buckwheat, Potatoes, Radish, Corn	Potatoes, Corn, Buckwheat, Oats
Breeding poultry	Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Chickens, Ducks	Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Chickens and Ducks	Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Chickens, Ducks	Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Chickens, Ducks	Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, Chickens, Ducks

3. Poverty Culture and Its Anti-poverty Governance in the Modern Context

The national targeted anti-poverty efforts in severely impoverished areas have a twofold purpose: the immediate one is to obviously improve the production and living conditions for severe poor populations and enhance the economic and social development levels in severely impoverished areas through a series of key anti-poverty actions, including infrastructure improvement, public service enhancement, industrial development and transfer employment, while the underlying intent to bridge the economic gaps between severely impoverished areas and well-off ones so as to ratchet up their levels of

modernization and modern civilization. With targeted anti-poverty efforts, modern ways of life, values, cultures, ideologies and so on will also come along into severely impoverished areas, local communities and local resident groups, especially being incorporated into locality, region and ethnicity-specific cultural traditions, and, in turn, influence, modify and transform their traditional values, lifestyles, cultural customs and habits to a certain extent. We found that, in the process of these targeted anti-poverty efforts, especially in the process of reforming poverty cultures, in Zhaojue County and a larger region Liangshan, the governments at all levels, On the one hand, have inoculated modern mentalities, concepts, behaviors, living habits and so on into severely impoverished areas and poor populations, and on the other, have created conditions for severely impoverished areas and the crowds to take the initiative to absorb the essentials of modernity.

(1) Poverty-reduction Goal: Four Betters

In order to better push ahead with targeted anti-poverty actions, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council promulgated the Resolution on Winning the Anti-poverty War on November 29, 2015 as the outline guidelines for carrying out poverty reduction works and tackling poverty-related key issues in the future, and set the national overall goal of Being Free of 2 Worries and Having 3 Guarantees (To make steady progress in poverty alleviation to have rural poor residents be free of worry about foods and clothing, and be guaranteed with access to compulsory education, basic medical care and housing security by 2020)[17]. Building on the spirits of the Resolution, the Provincial CPC Committee and Provincial Government of Sichuan expanded the national overall goal into a more ambitious provincial goal of Four Betters (Better Housing, Better Life, Better Habits and Better Social Morality). The expansion of the national overall goal directly broadened anti-poverty pushes in the Province to cover the fields of cultural life, highlighting the overall goal of

targeted poverty reduction pushes in the Province broadened beyond simply the anti-poverty in material life to incorporate the anti-poverty in cultural life (incl. lifestyles, social customs, mentalities). Such expansion of the anti-poverty overall goal is especially relevant to the modernization of ethnic settlement areas along the “Tibetan–Yi Corridor” in western Sichuan, and is also of great significance to facilitating the cultural development in severely impoverished areas in the Prefecture of Liangshan.

(2) Additional Front in Targeted Anti-poverty War: Transforming Outmoded Habits and Customs

At the High-level Forum on Anti-poverty and Development on Oct. 16, 2015, the Chinese President Xi Jinping first proposed the “Five Batches” tactics while addressing the topic of How to Accomplish Targeted Anti-poverty Mission. In the light of local realities, Liangshan worked out the “Seven Batches” general plan for its targeted anti-poverty undertaking, adding a new front: Transforming Outmoded Habits and Customs, among others, to the “Five Batches” tactics. The move hits the right nail by directly responding to cultural issues, such as outmoded social habits and customs among minority communities in Liangshan. Benchmarking against modern paradigms of social life, the government at all the levels has tried to promote more systematic transformation and improvement of backward social customs and habits in severely impoverished areas, including the social and cultural transformation of Yi ethnic communities in Liangshan.

(3) Practice Mechanisms for Accomplishing Goals and Implementing Measures

1. Organizational Structure

First, to staff capable anti-poverty cadre teams: in the Implementation Plan

for Co-opting and Managing Comprehensive Anti-poverty Task Forces to Yi ethnic Autonomous Prefecture of Liangshan issued in June 2018, the Organization Department of CPC Sichuan Committee required that, apart from existing anti-poverty forces posted in Liangshan from across the province, another more than 3,500 cadres and professional talents would be co-opted from 9 developed cities and 11 erstwhile poor counties/cities to be dispatched to 11 severely poor counties in Liangshan to carry out anti-poverty tasks and provide comprehensive supports for the next 3 years, with each anti-poverty team being responsible for helping one poor county get rid of poverty, and anti-poverty team members being deployed respectively at each county, township and village. Through constant improvement on the talent arrangement across the province, Sichuan continuously increased staff input to reinforce the anti-poverty forces in severely impoverished areas in Liangshan every year. Meanwhile, Liangshan itself also constantly developed and integrated its anti-poverty leading teams respectively at the county, township and village levels. For example, in 2018, without prejudice to the relative stability of party/government establishments at the county and township levels, Liangshan seconded capable young leaders at the county and township levels to reinforce party/government teams in poor counties, seconded young reserve or alternative cadres at the county and township levels to work as deputy secretaries of the party committee at poor villages and townships, and seconded grass-roots civil servants co-opted among local public institution workers and retired soldiers and outstanding college graduates in urgent specialties to work at poor counties to optimize the structure of cadre teams there. At the village level, the program of “Building up Mass Basis and Unite Local Folks” was launched to strengthen grass-roots party units (village party branches, villagers’ committees and teams of resident first party secretaries) for enhancing their capabilities in serving anti-poverty causes and solving key problems. With reinforced cadre teams, Liangshan integrated the goal of “Four Betters” and the measures of “Transforming Outmoded Habits

and Customs” into the whole process of anti-poverty campaigns, pushing ahead with all the works following the organizational workings: Prefecture Being Responsible for Overall Planning, County for Coordination, Township for Organization, and Village for Implementation.

Second, to set up and cultivate mass organizations: by setting up, supporting and developing various mass organizations (village party branch committees, villagers’ committees, management committees of weddings & funerals, moral evaluation committees, anti-drug associations and others) in administrative villages of poor counties, and leveraging the synergies from administrative means and villagers’ autonomy systems, Liangshan vigorously procured poor masses to adopt modern social and cultural concepts and life styles, and develop modern behavioral habits. Take the management committee of weddings & funerals as an example, it is required that the president should be a village cadre or an experienced villager in wedding & funeral rites, the vice president and directors the influential and widely respected villagers being willing to make contributions and skilled in organization and coordination, and retired cadres who were former leaders at governmental agencies, enterprises and institutions, should also be encouraged to sit on these committees. These committees shall consist of 5– 9 members.

According to interviewees from C village in Zhaojue, in Yi ethnic minority villages, if there are Degus (venerable sages skilled at dispute mediation in Yi ethnic clans) sitting on the committee, things are easier to get done. So, villages are eagerly lobbying these Degus to join the committees. In other mass organizations, like Drug Control & AIDS Prevention Associations, village party branches and Yi ethnic clans works with each other following the organizational mechanism of sharing responsibilities and joint management based on mutual consultation.

2. Institutional System

First, to enact policies in due course to provide a solid institutional guarantee: in its Resolution on Making Focused and Concerted Efforts to Win the Targeted Campaign Against Severe Poverty, the Party Committee of Liangshan Prefecture clearly put forward the requirements: Focus Efforts on Transforming Outmoded Customs and Persistently Tackling Key Issues, and Further Promote the Building of Villages and Civilized Families of Four Betters. Back in March 2016, the Party Committee and Government of Liangshan had already issued the Opinions on Building “Four Betters” Families in the New Rural Areas (trial). The introduction of this policy document provides institutional guarantee and administrative support to pushing for the goal of “Four Betters” and implementing the initiative of transforming outmoded habits and customs.

Second, to work out grass-roots implementation plans: at the behest of the Spiritual Civilization Development Committee of Zhaojue County, most villages in the county had specific implementation plans suitable for their own actual conditions. Taking A village in Zhaojue we conducted field investigations in as an example. In June 2016, it set out the Implementation Plan to Promote the Transformation of Outmoded Habits and Customs in A Village, and then, in January 2018, the Implementation Plan to Build “Four Betters” Families in A Village, having guiding concepts, objectives, purposes, tasks and requirements for these undertakings clearly defined in the form of working schemes.

Third, to establish community regulations: for the purpose of better accomplishing the goal of Four Betters and implementing the measures of transforming outmoded habits and customs, the government required the villages to set out village regulations in the light of their respective realities, having specific requirements on outdated custom transformation and modern lifestyle development enshrined in these protocols for discussion

and approval from all the villagers. In addition to the role of regulating and guiding villagers' behaviors, most of these regulations also have reward & punishment provisions in them. In the case of B village in Zhaojue we conducted field investigations, the Article 6 of the Village Regulations states that the "5-washing" requirement shall be strictly observed by villagers, and villagers' teams shall conduct the hygiene inspection and evaluation on each household and individual every month. The 10 monthly worst performers will be publicly criticized, and these being among the 10 monthly worst performers twice or more within one year will be punished by a fine of RMB 100–500, and disqualified, in principle, for some policy-mandated preferential treatments for farmers within the current year, while the 10 best performers will be granted with appropriate financial rewards.

3. Methods

First, to promote vigorously farmers' evening classes: as from 2016, Liangshan began to try on evening classes for local farmers in a bid to close gaps among farming villagers, especially young farmers, in scientific and technological knowledge, culture, ideas, policies, regulations, anti-poverty insights, and practical skills. These classes focused on various topics, including refined or localized work schemes, policy & law publicity, transformation of unhealthy customs, building "Four Betters", bilingual languages learning, practical skills, employment training, thanksgiving education, drug control & anti-AIDS among rural residents. By 2017, evening classes have been promoted in all villages across the Prefecture of Liangshan, with sessions in intensive learning held at least twice or thrice every month, and each session lasting at least 2 hours.

Farmers' evening classes became government-sponsored important venues for local villagers to acquire modern values, life styles and life skills. The following table gives the briefings on farmers' evening classes in A village in

Zhaojue County in the first half of 2018.

Table 2: Briefings on Farmers' Evening Classes in A Village in Zhaojue

Time	Venue	Instructor	Brief Description
April 14, 2018 (Session 13)	Meeting Hall of Village Party Branch	Village Party Branch Secretary	To change villagers' improper behaviors and rectify bad customs (such as extravagant consumption, lavish weddings & funerals and other unhealthy habits), the Village Branch Secretary discussed in details with attendees on how to transform outmoded customs. Through in-depth conversation, villagers voted by a show of hands that the rules and regulations on transforming outmoded customs should be seriously observed.
April 19, 2018 (Session 14)	Meeting Hall of Village Party Branch	Township Party Secretary	In-depth explanations on the spirits of speeches delivered by Secretary of the Provincial CPC Committee Peng Qinghua were given to villagers in bilingual languages, and the call for villagers to make such transformations, strive for self-development, and get rid of the backward mindset of Waiting, Being Dependent and Begging for Excessive External Assistance was made.
April 23, 2018 (Session 15)	Meeting Hall of Village Party Branch	Embroidery Teachers Invited by the Organization Department of the CPC Committee of Zhaojue	To increase and improve villagers' self-development skills, embroidery teachers were invited by the organization department of the county party committee to hold vocational skill training sessions in villages.
April 30, 2018 (Session 16)	Working Office of Village Party Branch	First Party Secretary of A Village	To organize villagers to learn villagers' deliberation knowledge, including: 1. how to give full play to public opinions. 2. how to give full play to democratic processes. 3. how to give full play to public supervision.
May 4, 2018 (Session 17)	Working Office of Village Party Branch	Township Party Secretary	To enhance moral consciousness and promote moral development among villagers, township party secretary gave a lecture on getting rich through hard work, strengthening the awareness of generating wealth through labor among villagers.
May 10, 2018 (Session 18)	Working Office of Village Party Branch	First Party Secretary of A Village	Lectures on how to escape from natural disasters, prepare against floods and conduct self-rescue were delivered to villagers.
May 17, 2018 (Session 19)	Working Office of Village Party Branch	Township Head	Briefings on new farmers' quality improvement program were given. First of all, poor scientific and cultural knowledge among farmers restricts the application of advanced technology and equipment to agricultural production. Second, outdated ideological and ethical standards among farmers restrict the formation of healthy social atmosphere in rural areas.

Second, to enhance the effectiveness of mobilization and consultation through small talks at a fire pit: in Yi ethnic communities, the small-talks-by-a-fire-pit usually smacks of a special and strong affection and kinship. This working method of "small-talks-by-a-fire-pit" means that anti-poverty cadres drop in at Yi ethnic families in the evening, and talk with Yi ethnic residents face to face by the fire pit, acting as if being their family members or relatives. In sharp contrast with lectures and discussions at farmers' evening classes,

where some villagers tend to not speak out their minds, raise their questions, or put up their inquiries in public even if they fail to understand the contents, or have dissatisfaction, or have complaints, the small-talks-by-a-fire-pit method offers an opportunity to confused or disgruntled villagers to air their complaints, give their opinions, and fully express their own ideas. Through this kind of open-hearted casual conversations as if they happened among family members and relatives, it is easier for anti-poverty cadres to dispel some misunderstandings of Yi ethnic villagers about some of anti-poverty works. The First Party Secretary of A Village in Zhaojue said: “A Degu family in the village was to hold a funeral. According to related regulations on eliminating outdated customs, no more than four cattle should be killed for the event. But the Degu disagreed, expressing it was hard for him to accept emotionally such requirements” . Through repeated conversations of the small-talks-by-a-fire-pit style, the family was finally persuaded. As the Degu was successfully lobbied to support new customs, other villagers readily followed suit, observing consciously these requirements and regulations.

Third, to Guide Villagers via “Integrity Bank” Incentive Mechanism: the Integrity Bank herein is a bank for encouraging compliant behaviors of depositors/villagers. Operating like a bank, villagers deposit their integrity scores (obtained through evaluation on their virtuous behaviors, namely ones being compliant with related regulations and standards) into their bank cards established at the bank, and then, draw funds in cash or pay for the living goods at the fund supermarket at the village. The operation of the Integrity Bank is to inactivate the masses to consciously develop a behavioral habit of being compliant with regulations and standards.

4. Contents

From anti-poverty work plans unveiled by all levels of government, villagers’

regulations and evaluation standards for “Four Betters” , we found that the following four categories of modern lifestyles and social customs are among the top priorities governments focused on establishing, promoting or strengthening.

First, Modern Living Habits: including personal hygiene habits (such as do regular washing, bathing and clothing-washing, and keep clean and tidy living rooms and courtyards, etc.); public hygiene habits (such as no littering of wastes, orderly storing firewood or other farming materials); cooking & catering habits (the Government of Zhaojue County invested RMB 4.065 million in purchasing cooking devices, dinning tables and chairs – RMB 15,000 each set – and training 1-2 chefs for 271 villages in the county. These cooking devices may be rented out by villagers’ committees to farmer households for weddings and funerals, and these chefs may be employed to provide catering services in such events, so as to eliminate related problems and dangers, such as extravagant consumption, lavish weddings & funerals, non-nutritional catering, unhygienic foods and beverages, and other unhealthy habits); energy-consuming habits (the Government of Zhaojue County was planned to invest RMB 20.0 million in five years in building 1,500 top-pressured full-glass fiber reinforced plastic methane pits, installing 5,000 solar water heaters and upgrading firewood-saving cooking stoves for 2,000 households in a bid to encourage poor residents to get rid of the habit of “Cooking with Firewood and Heating by a Fire Pit” . In addition, this move also greatly contributed to less deforestation, more sustainable ecological environments and improved domestic hygiene and family health); and use habits of toilets (the Government of Zhaojue County encouraged poor villages to build public toilets and poor households to build in-door sanitary latrines by providing financial subsidiaries, and strove to promote these measures across the county in 3 years, eliminating the unavailability of sanitary toilets in poor rural areas.

Second, Modern Social Customs: focusing on transforming backward customs and habits of weddings and funerals. Bimos, Degus and Clans (all are branches of Yi ethnic) as well as “two represents and one member on villagers’ committees” were invited to take part in group consultation on wedding & funeral reforms. The scope and spending of wedding & funeral rites were restricted based on ethnic traditions and local affordability levels, and villagers’ rules and regulations laid down to discourage unhealthy habits (such as pricey betrothal gifts, upward social comparisons, lavish funerals, etc.) in favor of modern fashions (such as simplified weddings & funerals, modest betrothal gifts, etc.). In addition, no cliques, factions or family/clan-exclusive juntas were allowed, and active participation in public events at village organizations was encouraged to contribute to the development, unity and harmony of the whole villages.

Third, Modern Moral Sense and Legal Awareness: to learn, know and abide by laws, and consciously observe villagers’ rules and regulations, refuse illegal and undisciplined behaviors, oppose drug abuse and trafficking, and resolutely fight against illegal and criminal acts; to abide by family planning policies and regulations, and avoid unplanned births; and to resolve conflicts or disputes through villagers’ organization mediation or legal means, and not infringe on personal and property rights of others.

Fourth, Modern Concepts and Values: to respect science, boycott cult activities, and seek timely treatments through scientific medical methods rather than superstitious means; to learn advanced development modes, drop backward ideas, and diversify alternatives to get rich; to uphold gender equality, ethnicity equality and marriage freedom, and prohibit discriminating on, abusing or and abandon of ning baby girls; and to value modern education, having all children (adolescents) get access to schooling (preschool,

compulsory or senior high school education) and prohibiting forcing students at compulsory education ages to drop out of school.

5. Poverty Cultures and Dilemmas in Their Transformations – Looking From Locality’s Dimension

In severely impoverished areas in Liangshan, there in practice existed numerous conflicts or disagreements between much of “local knowledge” (which is part of local poverty culture) on the one side and targeted anti-poverty efforts and modern transformation drive on the other side. Yet, it is just the misinterpretation of much of “local knowledge” that led to ignoring the intrinsic logic of local knowledge, not only damaging the architecture of local features and characters, but also hindering the progress of targeted anti-poverty efforts, and therefore, letting the government’s poverty culture transformation push stuck in a dilemma.

(1) The Dilemma About Living Habits and Their Transformation

While advocating the “five-washing” requirement (hand-washing, face-washing, foot-washing, bathing, clothing-washing), many anti-poverty cadres in Liangshan tended to look down on poor Yi ethnic residents as being unhygienic, linking their poor sense of hygiene with their higher illness incidences and illness-induced poverty, and gendering the logical explanation: “poor hygiene leads to more illness, and then, more poverty”, and meanwhile, attributed the reluctance of poor Yi ethnic residents to follow the requirement to their laziness, forming the logical train of thoughts: “poor hygiene arises from laziness and leads to more poverty”. But in the eye of poor Yi ethnic residents, it is not the case. For example, a poverty family in D village in Zhaojue claimed: “paying no attention to hygiene has nothing to do with poor sense of hygiene. it is not necessary to be too clean in a daily life. For farmers in rural areas, you have to contact soil all the times while toiling

in the farming fields. If you focus too much on keeping cleanness, you simply can't be fully preoccupied with your work all the time. Conversely, if you go on your dating, of course, you must always keep yourself clean and neatly, and you must get decked up nicely. So, our hygiene habits have nothing to do with illness and poverty. Our air and soil, as well as our foods and vegetables, are all completely clean, absolutely hygienic and healthy, free from any pollution. So, how can we get ill! As for the saying that seldom taking a bath is due to laziness, that is a complete nonsense. It is that hard farming has exhausted us. We have no time or mood to take a bath so often. What's the big deal with or without a bath? I know, it is easier said than done. You, these official guys, I guessed you are too used to wear your white shirts!" From these remarks, it could be seen that from the perspective of poverty families, many such statements by anti-poverty cadres were unrealistic assumptions, and many requirements were also much ado about nothing. These plausible logical explanations translate into cultural labels in due course, resulting in cultural misreading into poor groups and alienating poor groups from anti-poverty cadres. In fact, drawing upon pollution and diseases, poverty families have unconsciously criticized ecological environmental problems coming with modernization drives and imperfections in modern ecological environmental ethics.

(2) The Dilemma About Social Customs and Their Transformation

In transforming outdated minority customs in Liangshan, the biggest resistance came from the field of simplifying weddings & funerals. A series of ritual activities, with the participation from Bimos, are held in funerals in Yi ethnic communities. These traditional ritual activities smack of strong features of Yi ethnic culture, and also contain the spiritual feelings, beliefs and collective identity of Yi ethnic communities. But in the initiative to reform social customs, the government not only restricted the size and spending of such rites, but

also required them to simplify the procedures of these ceremonies. Classifying these rituals as backward and primitive social customs, and associating them with poverty, anti-poverty cadres concluded that to go out of poverty, they must give up these backward customs and transfer to adopt new trends of modern civilization. A Yi ethnic interviewee in D village contended: "These rituals have nothing to do with backwardness and poverty. Instead, in our Yi ethnic communities, those with higher education and wealth even more value these rituals. Should these things be simplified or disappear, where would we derive our confidence and pride from as Yi ethnic folks? If we were backward in everything, where would our self-confidence come?" In their view, these time-honored ritual activities have come down through generations, helping unite their spiritual strength and keep them enterprising. In anti-poverty pushes, misreading into some social customs not only undercut the architecture of local features and characters, but also rendered many targeted anti-poverty measures falling by the way among local societies and poor communities.

(3) The Dilemma About Legal Awareness and Their Transformation

In Liangshan, especially in predominately Yi ethnic rural areas, they have their own unique set of ethics, norms and moral standards, which is full-fledged and functions well, and Yi ethnic communities have long relied on such ethics system to maintain their social order. First Party Secretary of C Village holds that, all the clans of the Yi ethnic observe the same set of ethics system, which is quite perfect and binding. So, almost all contradictions and disputes can be settled through it. They are always playing by rules rather than laws. As a result, only by linking government's laws and regulations with their own system can you effectively build their legal awareness. In Yi ethnic communities, those well versed in this ethics system and skilled at conciliation and mediation are respected as Degus, namely sages or wise men, who are

prestigious and influential. Degus have the responsibility for settling disputes within Yi ethnic societies. For example, blooded oath is a Chinese ancient practice which is still popular even in today's times, especially in minority communities, where an oath is taken by drinking collectively the wine which is mixed with blood of all oath takers or animals, such as chicken, sheep and cattle. In implementing drug control & anti-AIDS measures under the "Seven Batches" anti-poverty program, given marked ineffectiveness of legal publicity campaigns, A village succeed in implementing these measures by the means of a blooded oath and accomplish the goal of drug control & anti-AIDS publicity, education, control and prevention among Yi ethnic villagers. In addition, a clan association was established at the village, a Degu was invited to be its president, and related provisions were laid down, including that violators of drug control & anti-AIDS requirements will be disqualified from clans' weddings or funerals events, family activities" or even expelled from the clans. On these occasions, there remain tremendous gaps in terms of practical effectiveness and actual effects between modern laws and locality or ethnicity-specific normative cultures, especially in remote rural areas, posing a daunting challenge to building and enhancing modern legal awareness and pushing ahead with targeted anti-poverty undertakings among predominately Yi ethnic rural areas.

6. Poverty Culture and Dual Consciousness: Theoretical Explanations and Governance Tactics

(1) Poverty Culture: A State Power-based Explanation

Without doubt, either the intrinsic social life logic and value system of modernity itself or modernization-based and orientated targeted anti-poverty efforts in severely impoverished areas have their logic and rational self-consistency to a great extent, and have the capability and consciousness to develop such self-consistency. China's modernization efforts over the past more

than a century have undoubtedly injected modern factors into various fields, leaving even severely impoverished areas or minority communities unable to stand aloof from the process of state-driven historical changes. Just as Mr. Zhu Xiaoyang put it, "many modern values have already emerged as shared core values in today's life to both the state and farmers" [17]. In severely impoverished areas, these localities with conditions of modern self-production and those populations under influences of modernity have already come through the preliminary transformation towards modernity, leading to a huge and ever-growing internal imbalance in economic, social and cultural fields across severely impoverished areas, and in turn, highlighting and intensifying tensions between modernity and locality, which are reflected to a varying degree in economic gaps, social equality issues and cultural conflicts among different segments of severely impoverished areas. With in mind modern benchmarks, targeted anti-poverty campaigns are aimed through enforced state intervention to pull the regions or populations characterized of economic poverty into the process of modernization, so as to close the internal imbalances in severely impoverished areas and, in turn, mitigate or re-balance the tensions between modernity and locality in a bid to eliminate economic disparities, glaring social problems and cultural conflicts.

Based on the empirical research on poverty culture governance practices in targeted anti-poverty drive in Liangshan, Sichuan, we found that it was exactly by incorporating modern contexts into its targeted anti-poverty drive that could the state (and its agent – government) invoke and impose modern ideologies and value systems, providing logical and reasonable rationality and legitimacy for carrying out poverty culture reforms in severely impoverished areas during its targeted anti-poverty drive. Apart from directly responding to actual material needs from poor peoples, the anti-poverty goal of Four Betters (Better Housing, Better Life, Better Habits and Better Social Morality) has modern cultural pursuits and social lifestyles integrated in it, seek for breakthroughs by

focusing on social custom transformation, and put forth a detailed and specific articulation and definition of modern paradigms of cultural and social life in various cultural contents and facets, such as living habits, social customs, moral sense, legal awareness, values, and concepts.

Moreover, all the initiative of cultural and social life reforms, from the goals, the measures, the contents to the standards, was completely driven by the state and the government. To ensure their effective implementation, the state reinforced its organizational basis, improved its system guarantee, and also instituted and innovated its working methods. The important consequences were that the state power and modern values were integrated into the targeted anti-poverty process in severely impoverished areas, and forcibly infiltrated the poverty and minority areas with strong local characteristics.

Local knowledge provides the self-consistent logic and rational basis for justifying poverty cultures. When it comes to locality, it means observing and understanding cultural phenomena in severely impoverished areas or poor minority areas from the internal perspective of local communities. If we agree with and acquire adequate local knowledge and get reconciled into local societies, we may, perhaps, be able to figure out and logical and rational intrinsic self-consistency of these phenomena themselves of poverty cultures. Economics from the dimension of external factors, politics from the standpoint of the state and government, and sociology from the dimension of modernity, respectively look into targeted anti-poverty efforts and their cultural implications in severely impoverished areas and ethnic minority areas, while anthropology does so from the internal angle of view and the dimension of the subjectivity of populace, trying to uncover their hidden logic and mechanisms. As for the use of “local knowledge”, Geertz’ s discourse on the topic of cultural interpretation[19] provided an epistemological inspiration

for intercultural understanding, guiding us to return to the practice of “to understand a culture from its natives’ points of view” [20].

Why did many measures for poverty culture reforms implemented by the state and the government in targeted anti-poverty campaigns in Liangshan, Sichuan, go nowhere or run into a stone wall? The reason was poor masses made logical dissection of some state/government-dominated anti-poverty moves targeting their poverty cultures based on their “local knowledge” and thus put up some outspoken resistance. These dissection and resistance made many anti-poverty policies and measures ineffective or unfeasible in local cultural and social life, as a result landing nowhere. As Scott said, “without taking into account local values and practices, these State-backed projects..., in the end, delivered very disappointing outcomes” [21].

In promoting targeted anti-poverty drive, some measures advocated by the government often played modern values off against local special cultures, and then, wrote off local unique cultures as old-fashioned and backward. The logic behind it was not entirely deemed as the contradiction between local unique traditions and modern values, but, in essence, the one between the subject power of the state or the government metaphorizing and being metaphorized by modernity and the subject power of locality. While forcibly initiating a modernization drive at local and grass-roots societies, the state also tried to impose the state power and will on local and grass-roots societies. Now that the state power-mandated modernization drive has granted the dominant position to modern ideologies, modern cultural and social life paradigms understandably rose in due course to be mainstream ones, and so, the dubious relationship of metaphorizing and being metaphorized between modernity and the state was established. On the strength of the power of the state, modernity penetrated into societies, while with modern ideologies

spreading out, the state power thrust into locality, and then, become fixed in stone in local societies.

However, while expanding, appeals of state power are not necessarily in sound agreement with modern values. When the expansion of state power meets resistances, on the pretext of specious logical explanations, it is very convenient to label some local cultures as so-called poverty cultures blocking modern value appeals to get rid of poverty and become rich, and lash out at and derogate the so-called poverty cultures. The lower the derogation, the weaker the local subjectivity, the stronger the necessity and legitimacy of the state to carry out local transformations, and the more effective the transformations will be. This is exactly the inherent logic that local or ethnic cultures, even if they would coexist comfortably with modern values, remained misleadingly written off as poverty cultures in targeted anti-poverty efforts in severely impoverished areas.

In this process, with its natural arrogance and self-conceitedness, state power would risk objectifying the subjectivity of local poor and ethnic minority groups and restraining their endogenous dynamics, which would necessarily lead to alienated relationships between modern values and local cultures. However, the fact that many anti-poverty measures targeting poverty cultures in Liangshan, Sichuan were rendered ineffective or unfeasible in severely impoverished areas or cultural and social life of poor or ethnic minority populations suggests that it is impossible for modern ideologies, which metaphorize the state, to fully merge and assimilate the locality in its entirety. On the one hand, despite being misleadingly derogated, these local cultures have their own local knowledge as their logical and rational underlying support, leaving many specious explanations before them turn out to be untenable; while on the other hand, by adapting to and coalescing with modern essentials

constantly, many local cultures have also risen to be the endogenous driving force behind anti-poverty drives in local poor populations. Furthermore, to reach out down to localities and communities, state power also has to rely on local social and cultural forces under many occasions.

(2) Dual Consciousness: Governance Options for Transforming Poverty Cultures

The foregoing empirical investigation and analysis show that neither the transformations to poverty cultures enforced by modernity which metaphorizes the state nor the justifications for poverty cultures put up by locality could establish their respective subjectivity based on mutually exclusive subjective concepts. Subjectivity can't be internally established only on its own of a subject. A subject must resort to external relationships, being incorporated in the context of external relationships, and explore possible options to establish its subjectivity in such context [22]. Therefore, in the governance structure of targeted anti-poverty efforts in severely impoverished areas, especially in poverty culture transformations in ethnic minority communities, modernity must exercise its consciousness to locality and vice versa. And then, there will be some kind of consensual relationship arising from the two types of consciousness. It should be in such a consensual relationship to work out the governance tactics for transforming local poverty cultures.

Firstly, to effectively strengthen the subjectivity of poor populations, cultivate their endogenous powers, involve them in public undertakings, and respond to their interest appeals: Now, respecting the subjectivity of the poor remains just a lip service, largely being stuck at policy texts or propaganda slogans and delivering no meaningful actual effects. To this, concrete paths and mechanisms to realize the subjectivity of poverty-stricken peoples should be explored. The author thinks that there are options at at least two levels: the one level is the policy process from formulation, implementation, evaluation

and feedback, where poor populations should be fully represented, involved, heard and responded to timely so as to establish demand-oriented, poor population-dominated policy generation and implementation mechanisms; and the other the implementation process at the grass-roots, where villagers' autonomy and democratic mechanisms should be employed and innovated for managing anti-poverty efforts, and organizations and cultures of ethnic minority communities (such as clans of Yi ethnic ethnic) be leveraged for facilitating modern transformation of traditional villagers' organizations, cultural elements and governance systems.

Secondly, with in mind to promote interaction and blending of local knowledge and modern values, the engagement interface between modernity-mandated value appeals and locality-specific cultural traits should be continuously expanded, and meanwhile, self-consciousness of both the state (and its agent: government) and poor groups should be established, and a consensual space between them created, so as to iron out any possible estrangements and misunderstandings among the state, societies and poverty farmers in a bid to re-consolidate the social basis for, and re-rally the populaces behind, a sound anti-poverty governance system.

Last but not least, the endogenous power in the severely impoverished areas and their poor groups should be activated and unleashed: on the one hand, anti-poverty organizations, groups and individuals posted in poor villages or populations should try to be empathized with poor villages and villagers, standing in their shoes to truly understand their historical origins, living conditions and development demands, and pertinently match external assistance with their internal demand; while on the other hand, poor areas and local populations should also dissect and reflect on their own cultures and cultural rituals by benchmarking against modern civilizations, and keep

open their mind, their heart and their arms to the outside world and modern civilizations.

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