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Research on the Innovation of Rural Governance in Dehong Prefecture from the Perspective of the Rural Revitalization Strategy

Cao Han*, Bai Lin
School of Economics and Management, Dehong Teachers' College, Mangshi, Yunnan, 678400, China
Corresponding author, e-mail: caohan2013@gmail.com

Abstract:
"Rural governance" is a pivotal component and fundamental support in the implementation of China's rural revitalization strategy, acting as a cornerstone of the national governance system. Dehong Prefecture, located on the southwestern frontier of China in Yunnan Province, is characterized by its ethnic diversity, borderland attributes, and relatively underdeveloped economy. These intersecting features contribute to a complex and urgent rural governance situation, presenting multiple challenges for local development. This paper systematically reviews the current state and historical development of rural governance in Dehong Prefecture, analyzes the achievements and problems in present governance practices, and identifies persistent weaknesses in areas such as grassroots organization building, collective economic development, public participation, and the provision of public services. To effectively link the modernization of governance in ethnic border regions with the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas, this study proposes targeted strategies from multiple dimensions, including strengthening governance teams, improving organizational systems and training mechanisms, promoting the collective economy, enhancing governance technologies, improving institutional construction and enforcement, and leveraging the governance function of ethnic cultures.

Keywords:
Post-pandemic era; rural revitalization; rural governance; Dehong Prefecture; ethnic border regions

Introduction

"Effective governance" is both a fundamental requirement and a core objective of the rural revitalization strategy. Only through effective rural governance can comprehensive revitalization of rural areas be achieved. As the cornerstone of the national governance system, rural governance represents the most basic and foundational level of governance. It plays a vital role in the construction of a scientific national governance framework and the advancement of governance modernization. Moreover, it serves as a key guarantee for the thorough implementation of rural revitalization (Zhang Liangang et al., 2023; Hu Xuehong, 2022) [1][2].

In contrast to rural areas in other regions, villages in ethnic border areas are characterized by their ethnic diversity and borderland attributes. As a result, rural governance in these regions not only impacts the imple-

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mentation and objectives of the rural revitalization strategy but also has significant implications for enhancing the national governance system and capacity. More importantly, it is closely related to ethnic unity and harmony, social prosperity and stability, as well as the long-term peace in border areas. Adopting context-specific approaches, clarifying the roles and boundaries between the government and diverse social actors, and exploring a modern governance model characterized by co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits in ethnic border regions have become pressing and realistic issues (Zhu Huali, 2019) [3]. Such efforts are crucial for achieving the dual goals of border consolidation and prosperity, as well as the revitalization of ethnic minority border areas.

In May 2021, the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Government held an on-site working meeting in Dehong Prefecture, explicitly proposing that Dehong should strive to become a "demonstration zone for rural revitalization, borderland openness, and ethnic unity and progress." In the process of building a rural revitalization demonstration zone, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to fully understand the contemporary implications of rural governance in Dehong, objectively analyze the prominent issues in the current governance system, and undertake a logical shift in governance approaches. This shift aims to transition from the externally driven, resource-intensive model of "targeted poverty alleviation" to a new model of "rural revitalization" that emphasizes subjectivity and endogenous development. It will help construct an innovative rural governance mechanism and system tailored to border regions, thus facilitating the coordinated development of rural production, epidemic prevention and control, border security, socio-economic development, and effective rural governance. Ultimately, this will enhance the governance efficiency and overall capacity in rural border areas.

1. The Current Situation of Rural Areas and Poverty Governance in Dehong Prefecture

1.1 Basic Conditions and Characteristics of Rural Areas in Dehong Prefecture

Dehong Prefecture is located on the southwestern border of China, in the southern extension of the Hengduan Mountains on the western Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. It borders Longling County and Tengchong City of Baoshan Municipality to the east and northeast and shares its southern, western, and northwestern borders with the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Historically, Dehong has served as an important passageway along the "Southwestern Silk." Except for Lianghe County, all counties and cities in the prefecture share international borders, totaling 503.8 kilometers in length. According to official data from the Dehong Prefectural Government, the region currently has three national first-class ports (Ruili, Wanding, and Mangshi Airport) and two national second-class ports, in addition to 64 land routes and 28 ferry crossings that connect with Myanmar. Dehong covers a total area of 11,172 square kilometers, encompassing two county-level cities and three counties, with 49 townships, 2 subdistrict offices, 340 village committees, 81 residents' committees, and 3,784 villagers' groups [4].

According to the Dehong Prefectural Government website (2024), Dehong is home to more than 30 ethnic minority groups, primarily including the Dai, Jingpo, Lisu, De'ang, and Achang ethnicities. Multiple religions coexist in the region, including Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity. It is also the main

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settlement area in China for the Jingpo, De'ang, and Achang peoples [4]. The rural economy of Dehong is relatively underdeveloped and highly dependent on single industries, characterized by a fragile ecological environment, low levels of human capital, lagging rural cultural development, and an overall structure marked by ethnic diversity, borderland remoteness, mountainous terrain, and poverty. Its governance system is more complex than that of the inland regions and, therefore, requires greater policy attention.

Chinese villages are typically formed by extended families or various ethnic groups based on geographic proximity, resulting in close-knit communities governed by kinship ties and customary norms—often referred to as "acquaintance societies" or semi-acquaintance societies (Hong Mingyong & Shi Guoqing, 2006; Zhang Xuhong, 2022; ZHENG Hang, 2017) [5][6][7]. In ethnic minority regions, villages often retain distinct traditional customs and religious practices. Due to their relatively scattered settlements and underdeveloped infrastructure—especially in terms of transportation—many of these rural communities remain relatively isolated and operate as independent village units, often in a state of "large dispersion and small concentration" (LIANG Chen, 2012; Tang Shufu et al., 2014) [8][9].

When compared to their urban counterparts, rural inhabitants tend to be more conservative in their thinking and have limited exposure to external information. They have not yet fully embraced the values, thought patterns, and behavioral habits that characterize a modern market economy. As a result, they struggle to adapt to the free-flowing and efficient interactions that are typical of contemporary markets. The prevalence of smallholder farming makes it challenging for rural economies to integrate with broader markets, leading to relatively slow social and economic development. The urban-rural divide remains significant, and rural areas are often described as "closed, stagnant, and homogeneous." Phrases such as "farmers are truly suffering, the countryside is truly poor, and agriculture is truly risky" are widely used to depict the hardships faced by rural communities (ZHANG Ying, 2016; Li Huanhuan & Shi Xiaohua, 2019; ZHANG Chao & Feng Xingyuan, 2024; Ma Xiaolong & YAN Lu, 2019) [10][11][12][13].

In recent years, a significant number of rural youth and working-age adults have migrated to urban areas for education and employment opportunities. This has led to widespread trends of rural aging, household hollowing, and village depopulation, a phenomenon that Dehong is also experiencing (Xie Zhengfeng & Li Chuanyu, 2018) [14]. In addition to these general characteristics of rural China, rural areas in Dehong exhibit the following distinct traits:

1. Borderline Characteristics

Dehong Prefecture is geographically unique, situated deep within China's inland territory while also bordering its southwestern frontier. Some of its townships are located near the national border, and in certain cases, villages are situated directly on the borderline or even straddle it. This has given rise to complex geographic patterns where urban and rural spaces intersect, and the main urban centers interweave with frontier villages. Notable geographic phenomena such as "one village, two countries," "one household, two countries," and "one well, two countries" have emerged. According to data from the Dehong Prefectural Government (2024), out of the 49 townships in the prefecture, 22 are classified as border townships, accounting for 44.89% of the total. Among the 340 village committees and 3,784 village groups in the prefecture, there are 89 border village committees and 869 border village groups, accounting for 26.18% and 22.97%, respectively [4].

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These characteristics of adjacency and transnational proximity have made rural Dehong particularly susceptible to both traditional and non-traditional risks, which are difficult to prevent and control. Drug trafficking remains a persistent issue, while the spread of HIV/AIDS, the COVID-19 pandemic, and transnational crimes have inflicted severe social and economic consequences on the border townships.

2. Ethnic Diversity

The rural population of Dehong Prefecture is characterized by a high degree of ethnic diversity and complexity, particularly in border villages. A strong sense of ethnic identity and clan-based social organization is prevalent, especially among communities situated along the border. According to the Statistical Bulletin of Dehong Prefecture (2022), as of 2021, the prefecture's permanent resident population was 1.316 million, comprising 673,000 agricultural residents and 645,000 non-agricultural residents, with an urbanization rate of 48.94%. The ethnic minority population totaled approximately 603,300, representing 45.84% of the total population. Around 80% of these ethnic minorities reside in rural areas [15].

Further data released by the Dehong Bureau of Statistics (2023) indicates that ethnic minority border residents constitute more than half of the total border population in the prefecture. As a result, issues related to ethnicity, religion, and cross-border relations have become increasingly multifaceted and complex [15].

1.2 Basic Situation of Rural Poverty Governance in Dehong Prefecture

From the perspective of rural poverty governance practices, Dehong Prefecture, along with the rest of the country, has implemented targeted rural poverty alleviation initiatives since the mid-1980s based on China's official minimum living standards. These efforts have accelerated the pace of rural economic development, enabling the poor population to experience significant improvements and gradually lift themselves out of poverty. Two key periods can be identified:

1. The Period of New Socialist Countryside Construction

In October 2005, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was held, during which major decisions and deployments were made to accelerate the construction of a new socialist countryside. In response to the directives of this session, Dehong Prefecture swiftly took action, prioritizing the new countryside initiative as the central task of its economic agenda (BAI Lin & YU Mei, 2009) [16]. Planning for the construction of new rural areas was formulated, and pilot programs were launched. Various model villages were promoted, including "well-off villages," "civilized villages," "eco-villages," and "harmonious villages," with full-village development strategies implemented accordingly.

Since March 2007, under national arrangements, Dehong Prefecture has regularly dispatched outstanding Party members and cadres to serve as "rural work instructors," thereby launching village-by-village efforts to promote the "new countryside" campaign. The campaign, led by the government and centered on increasing farmers' income, focused on cultivating and strengthening pillar industries, building modern agricultural infrastructure, and improving rural production and living conditions. The overarching goal was to reshape the rural landscape (BAI Lin & YU Mei, 2009) [16]. Based on local realities, Dehong also integrated the new countryside initiative with anti-drug and HIV/AIDS prevention efforts, advancing them simultaneously in a coordinated manner.

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As a result, farmers' incomes increased, agricultural efficiency improved, and the rural social environment underwent significant transformation. The "three rural" issues (agriculture, rural areas, and farmers) were partially addressed, and progress was made across economic, political, cultural, and Party-building dimensions. Material, spiritual, and ecological civilization emerged prominently, ushering in a period of rapid development for rural Dehong (BAI Lin & YU Mei, 2009) [16].

However, challenges persisted due to the significant gap in urban-rural development. Following the abolition of agricultural taxes and the large-scale migration of young and middle-aged rural laborers to urban areas, the productive link between farmers and land further weakened. Urbanization and marketization profoundly altered the foundational structure of rural society in Dehong. In many areas, the "three hollowing-out phenomena"—aging rural populations, empty-nest households, and hollowed-out villages—became increasingly evident. The household became the dominant social unit, while rural public life became burdensome, weakening the social bonds between farmers and their communities. Talent shortages in rural construction have also become severe, contributing to visible signs of rural decline and posing serious challenges to achieving a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

2. The Period of the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

In the new era, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the CPC Dehong Prefectural Committee and the People's Government of Dehong Prefecture united all ethnic groups in the region to earnestly implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's series of important speeches and his two inspections of Yunnan. Poverty alleviation was identified as the most critical political task and the top priority for livelihood projects.

In line with the decisions and arrangements of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee and the provincial government, Dehong fully adhered to the principles of Party leadership and a people-centered approach, giving full play to the role of rural residents as the main actors. Both government guidance and market mechanisms were emphasized. A precise strategy was implemented, with a comprehensive poverty alleviation system put in place to deliver a coordinated "combination punch" against poverty. Phased deployments of village-level work teams and township/ county-level first secretaries were carried out, and a "Party-building plus" model was explored and promoted throughout the prefecture to advance targeted poverty alleviation efforts vigorously.

Focusing on the "two assurances and three guarantees" (i.e., no worries about food and clothing and guaranteed access to compulsory education, basic medical services, and safe housing), Dehong concentrated on six key projects and significantly increased investment in rural infrastructure, with cumulative funding reaching 12.94 billion yuan. With the establishment and continual improvement of the mechanisms for targeted poverty alleviation and eradication, the exploration of rural industrial development models, and the comprehensive implementation of support measures, historic breakthroughs were made in rural poverty governance in Dehong. The battle against poverty was won on schedule.

All four previously impoverished counties in the prefecture—Mangshi, Longchuan, Yingjiang, and Lianghe—were officially lifted out of poverty. All 186 impoverished villages were removed from the poverty list, and 152,500 registered impoverished individuals achieved poverty alleviation. Additionally, four "directly

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transitioned ethnic groups" and other small-population ethnic minorities were entirely lifted out of poverty, truly realizing a "leap forward of a thousand years."

Rural infrastructure underwent a dramatic transformation, with significant improvements in production and living conditions. Industrial foundations were notably strengthened, food and drinking water security were ensured, schooling for school-age children and access to basic medical care were guaranteed, and the living environment in rural areas improved markedly. The internal motivation for development among impoverished populations was greatly enhanced, and the previously uneven and insufficient development across townships was largely mitigated. Absolute poverty and regional poverty were effectively resolved, and the per capita disposable income of rural permanent residents has increased year by year, as detailed in the following table.

Growth of Per Capita Disposable Income of Rural Permanent Residents in Dehong Prefecture

Unit: Yuan (RMB)

Year	National	Yunnan Province	Dehong Prefecture		
			Total Income	% of the National Average	% of Provincial Average
2010	5919	3952	3368	56.9	85.22
2011	6977	4722	4096	58.71	86.74
2012	7917	5417	4763	60.16	87.93
2013	9430	6141	5608	59.47	91.32
2014	10489	7456	7152	68.19	95.92
2015	11422	8242	7917	69.31	96.06
2016	12363	9020	8659	70.04	96
2017	13432	9862	9464	70.46	95.96
2018	14617	10768	10325	70.64	95.88
2019	16021	11902	11409	71.21	95.86
2020	17131	12842	12356	72.13	94.5
2021	18931	14197	12418	65.59	87.47

Apart from the years 2020 and 2021, during which the COVID-19 pandemic had a sustained impact on Dehong Prefecture, resulting in slower growth in the per capita disposable income of rural permanent residents and a reduced share relative to national and provincial levels, the overall trend over the past decade shows a steady year-on-year increase in such income. The income gap between Dehong and the national and provincial averages has been narrowing, and the living standards and happiness index of the local population have gradually improved.

In the process of poverty governance, since 2019, a total of 121 villages in Dehong Prefecture have been designated as "Beautiful Villages," including 14 at the provincial level, 38 at the prefectural level, and 69 at the county level. Model villages such as Long'an Village in Longba Township and Yingpan Village in Mengyue Township of Longchuan County; the Yinjing Well-Off Border Village of the Shunha Village Committee in Jiexiang Township, Ruili City; Hejie Village in Nongzhang Township of Yingjiang County; Pingba Village in Mangdong Township and Manglong Village in Hexi Township of Lianghe County; and Huixian Village in Mangshi Town, among dozens of others, have played exemplary roles.

The fight against poverty has largely addressed the issue of absolute poverty by achieving the "Two Assurances and Three Guarantees" goals (ensuring food and clothing and guaranteeing compulsory education,

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basic medical care, and safe housing). However, the task of consolidating and expanding poverty alleviation achievements remains a daunting challenge. On October 18, 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, emphasizing the importance of addressing agricultural, rural, and farmer-related issues as a top priority for the Party's work. In December 2020, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the Opinions on Effectively Linking the Consolidation and Expansion of Poverty Alleviation Achievements with Rural Revitalization.

In response, the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee issued its No. 1 policy document to comprehensively promote rural revitalization and accelerate the modernization of agriculture and rural areas, clearly stating that rural revitalization should be pursued with the same intensity as poverty alleviation. The province is committed to integrating efforts to consolidate poverty alleviation achievements, advance rural revitalization, and build beautiful villages, with a continued focus on increasing farmers' income and promoting common prosperity (Liu Zuhua et al., 2022)[17].

In line with this, Dehong Prefecture has been actively advancing rural revitalization through its Party building efforts. It has strictly implemented the "Four No-Withdrawals" policy and has been promoting four special actions within the framework of "One Platform and Three Mechanisms." A total of 837 rural revitalization team members have been dispatched to all administrative villages across the prefecture. These efforts have primarily focused on four key areas: enhancing political functions and organizational capacity; accelerating the modernization of agriculture and rural areas and advancing common prosperity; modernizing rural governance systems and governance capacity to improve rural governance; and safeguarding and improving rural livelihoods while strengthening the relationship between the Party and the people. These initiatives aim to establish a strong connection between poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, thereby enhancing and energizing the rural revitalization process.

2. Basic Situation and Existing Problems of Rural Governance in Dehong Prefecture

2.1 Achievements and Characteristics of Rural Governance in Dehong Prefecture

For a long time, Dehong Prefecture has leveraged the political advantage of the Party's comprehensive leadership over rural work, actively breaking down institutional and systemic barriers that hinder coordinated grassroots governance. By integrating various forces to form a synergy, the prefecture has laid a solid foundation for rural governance, steadfastly maintained border stability, promoted rural socio-economic development, ensured the peaceful and contented lives of its people, and effectively promoted positive interactions between rural governance, social regulation, and villagers' autonomy in ethnic border areas. These efforts have raised the level of rural governance in border areas in terms of socialization, legalization, intelligence, and professionalism.

Comprehensively Strengthening the Party's Leadership over Rural Areas and Optimizing the Governance Subject Structure

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Dehong Prefecture has fully reinforced the Party's leadership over rural work, clarified the roles of governance subjects, and focused on building a four-level joint leadership coordination mechanism consisting of the prefectural Party Secretary, county Party Secretaries, township Party Secretaries, and village Party Organization Secretaries. The prefecture completed the re-election of the Party and village committees ("two committees") in all 411 villages, achieving the "one shoulder carrying" model in all villages except six with dispatched Party Secretaries. This arrangement tightened the responsibility of governance at every level, extending the Party's governance down to the "nerve endings" of rural governance, thereby clarifying the Party's role as the principal subject of rural governance in China.

At the same time, the village Party branch serves as the core, facilitating coordination among internal village entities such as professional cooperatives and rural leading households or talents. Under the context of abundant project resources flowing into rural areas and the shift of governance focus downward, this model not only resolved conflicts between village Party committees and village committees, achieving an organic integration of organizational intentions with villagers' wishes and unity between Party leadership and villagers' autonomy but also strengthened Party organizations' guidance and supervision over the entire rural governance process. It enhanced the Party's organizational capacity and resource integration, further consolidating organizational cohesion and endowing rural governance with more authoritative momentum.

Improving the Multi-stakeholder Collaborative Normative System of Rural Governance

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Dehong Prefecture has comprehensively coordinated epidemic prevention and control, border management, and grassroots social governance, constructing a rural governance normative system guided by "one core," supported by "two networks," promoted by the integration of "three governances," and guaranteed by "four systems."

Self-governance as Constraint: Established and improved village-level deliberation and decision-making systems; revised and perfected village regulations and agreements aimed at legality, feasibility, enforceability, and effectiveness; concentrated efforts to rectify extravagant bride prices and excessive ceremonies, promoting changes in customs; explored the "dual official seal" management system to mobilize public participation in governance fully.

Legal Education and Application through Case Explanation: Townships vigorously carried out legal education, comprehensive investigations, and mediation of conflicts and disputes, mobilizing mediators at township, village, and group levels, stationed rural work teams, and village elders ("Five Elders") to conduct face-to-face dispute resolution, aiming to solve problems at the grassroots and minimize escalation beyond the village.

Moral Education to Enhance Self-discipline: Vigorously promoted the core socialist values and ethnic traditional culture, using beautiful village construction and border well-off village projects as carriers, major ethnic festival activities as platforms, and established a batch of demonstration sites. By 2022, four national rural governance demonstration villages had been successfully established, including Dongbing Village in Jiucheng Town, Yingjiang County. Other recognitions include Hejie Village in Nongzhang Town (a National Civilized Village) and Banggai Village in Mengyang Town, Lianghe County (a National Demonstration Village for Democracy and Rule of Law). These efforts have created a positive and uplifting atmosphere

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throughout the prefecture. The construction of border "Moral Huts" has successfully promoted the practice of rural governance through a "point system." By the end of 2022, 142 "Moral Huts" had been established in 120 administrative villages (communities) across five counties and cities, forming a new model for rural governance in the new era.

Preliminary Establishment of Effective Rural Governance Operation Mechanisms

In recent years, Dehong Prefecture has promoted the comprehensive implementation of village committee Party organization secretaries serving as village committee directors and heads of village-level collective and cooperative economic organizations through legal procedures (Central Organization Department of the CPC, 2021)[18]. The prefecture also leverages local talent and attracts external talents to participate in rural governance, innovating talent utilization mechanisms.

By broadening funding sources and adopting multiple financing approaches, a relatively stable financial guarantee mechanism, initially dominated by fiscal input, has been established for village organization operational expenses. Multiple organizations and mobilizations guide rural new economic organizations and social organizations to serve rural areas. Efforts focus on building one-stop management and service platforms, as well as integrated online-offline village comprehensive service platforms. It includes establishing and improving grid management systems and rural convenience service systems and mechanisms.

The construction of autonomous organizations has been standardized and institutionalized, with village-level deliberation and consultation systems, as well as affairs guarantee mechanisms, established and improved. New governance mechanisms, based on Party-led co-construction, co-governance, and shared governance, have been explored alongside mechanisms for the coordinated development of rural governance and the socio-economic system, as well as inter-provincial support and cross-regional cooperation.

Efforts to Ensure Talent Support for Rural Governance

Rural development and governance depend on talent. To address the issues of insufficient quantity and quality of rural talent, as well as the lack of successors for village cadres, Dehong Prefecture made great efforts during the "two committees" re-election period to attract back 413 outstanding rural talents. At the same time, it gradually improved the salary and benefits of village committee members to alleviate their worries and maximize their initiative and enthusiasm. Considerable efforts were devoted to activating and training village committee governance talents to fill the rural talent gap, thus providing a talent guarantee for effective rural governance.

Dehong Prefecture also drafted and published the Implementation Plan for the "Ten Thousand Talents Revitalize Ten Thousand Villages" Campaign, closely integrating the village collective economic strong village project, the rural revitalization "Hundred Villages Demonstration and Thousand Villages Improvement" project, as well as dispatched village work teams, science and technology commissioners, and young cadres training and development. It organized and mobilized 367 talents to cover 348 villages, providing talent and intellectual support for rural revitalization.

Focused Implementation of the Village Collective Economy Strengthening Project

Dehong Prefecture emphasizes the development and expansion of village-level collective economies as a powerful tool to address the issue of "no money to do things" in rural governance and as a crucial measure to

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consolidate poverty alleviation outcomes. The prefecture formulated and implemented the Three-year Plan for Accelerating the Development and Expansion of Village-level Collective Economy in Dehong Prefecture (2021-2023), steadily advancing 48 village-level collective economic projects and 9 "four-in-one" border defense strengthening projects, consolidating the foundation of grassroots governance.

Further integration of all levels and types of agriculture-related project funds, revitalization of rural collective assets, funds, and resources, and promotion of the integration of primary, secondary, and tertiary rural industries are prioritized. Efforts focus on helping a batch of administrative villages develop and expand collective economies, cultivating key villages with annual operating incomes exceeding 100,000 yuan. All administrative villages in the prefecture have achieved annual operating income exceeding 20,000 yuan, with total collective village assets reaching 750 million yuan (XU Bo, 2020)[19].

At the same time, farmer-professional cooperatives have been gradually established. These cooperatives not only integrate various resources but also guide farmers to participate in the market in an organized manner, effectively linking small-scale household production with the ever-changing large market, promoting industries through markets and rural development through industries[15]. Cooperatives have become organizational platforms for households to connect with national policies and engage in the market economy in the new era, reconstructing village collectives and gradually becoming modern organizational forms of rural governance modernization (SHEN Qian, 2021)[20].

Filling Shortcomings and Strengthening Rural Governance Infrastructure

The modernization of rural governance systems and capabilities depends on a strong material foundation. Rural infrastructure that is outdated cannot meet the basic public service demands and governance needs of the broad rural population seeking a better life. Dehong Prefecture focuses on filling gaps, strengthening weak links, consolidating the foundation, and enhancing advantages. From start to finish, it prioritizes the construction of rural water, electricity, and road networks while increasing investment in village and group office spaces, personnel, equipment, and materials. Improvements in office conditions and the supply of basic public goods have helped fill the gaps in building a well-off society comprehensively and enhanced the efficiency of rural governance.

2.2 Problems in Rural Governance in Dehong Prefecture

Despite considerable investment and effort in rural governance, numerous difficulties persist, and several issues remain unresolved. In particular, the three-year COVID-19 pandemic has significantly complicated the governance environment in Dehong's rural areas, making post-pandemic rural governance even more challenging.

1. Formalism and Involution in Rural Governance

Rural governance in Dehong continues to rely heavily on a complex web of formal institutions, bureaucratic hierarchies, operational procedures, and administrative methods. Initially aimed at enhancing the standardization, efficiency, and modernization of rural governance, these refined systems, modern technologies, and rigorous evaluation mechanisms have become burdensome. As a result, rather than enabling village-level cadres to make full use of emotional governance techniques—such as leveraging interpersonal networks and

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the natural emotional bonds among ethnic groups to streamline governance, reduce costs, and improve effectiveness—formal procedures like trajectory supervision, clock-in systems, form-filling, and procedural management have proliferated (He Xuefeng, 2021)[21]. These have increased the workload and complexity for grassroots workers while failing to significantly improve villagers' quality of life or sense of gain.

2. Weak Governance Capacity of Core Actors

Grassroots Party organizations bear primary responsibility for rural governance. However, in some cases, the capacity of these organizations and village-level cadres falls short of governance demands. Their abilities to mobilize the public are weak, and they lack authority and influence. Some rural cadres have a superficial understanding of the Party's agricultural support and benefit policies, demonstrating strong dependency and passivity. Misjudgments in actual practice are common. Others, overwhelmed by numerous and intensive administrative tasks, neglect the mobilization and self-organization of rural communities. Village committees tend to become overly bureaucratic, with weakened service functions and difficulty in advancing public affairs. While Party committees and governments have issued increasingly detailed regulations to ensure the proper use of rural resources, such rules have inadvertently constrained the autonomy of local governance actors. Consequently, grassroots Party organizations have been unable to fully play their role as the backbone and pillar of rural governance.

3. Absence of Autonomous Actors and Low Civic Participation

Rural autonomy depends on active, capable villagers. However, the overall educational level of Dehong's farmers is relatively low, with a strong smallholder mentality and limited awareness of social development. Political apathy and a lack of public spirit are prevalent, resulting in low enthusiasm for participating in public affairs. Especially after the upward mobility of rural youth and talented individuals, the reserve force for self-governance has dwindled in both quantity and quality, resulting in structural imbalances among governance actors. Since the abolition of the agricultural tax, village collectives have lost a major source of income and financial security, weakening the autonomy organizations' ability to allocate resources and balance interests. The influence and cohesion of village cadres have declined noticeably. With limited compensation and little sense of achievement or recognition, it is challenging to inspire enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity in governance.

4. Weak Integration of "Trinary Governance" and Lack of Social Synergy

The core of "trinary governance" (rule of autonomy, rule of law, and rule of virtue) lies in integration. However, each of these approaches has its specific domain and institutional inertia. When multiple actors engage in rural governance without carefully considering the characteristics and positioning of each governance element, it becomes difficult to achieve integration and resonance. In Dehong, "autonomy" is still largely approached through administrative means, resulting in a parallel governance model. There has been insufficient integration of administrative, legal, ethical, and self-governance tools, nor has there been flexible complementarity or accommodation. During the poverty alleviation campaign and its follow-up stage, first secretaries and village work teams were dispatched by provincial, prefectural, and county-level governments for targeted assistance. While this strengthened governance capabilities at the village level, it also fostered dependency among village committees and passivity among villagers. Similarly, paired assistance programs

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and cross-regional support have, to some extent, reinforced the "wait-for-help" mentality.

5. Insufficient Supply of Public Goods in Rural Governance

Although the state has made substantial efforts to alleviate poverty and strengthen governance in impoverished rural areas—particularly through support from all levels of government, East-West collaboration initiatives, and various economic organizations—limitations remain due to constrained government finances and longstanding deficits. The development of rural industries has lagged, and both governmental and village-level financial resources are limited. Overall, the supply of public services still falls short of villagers' demands, and the urban-rural gap remains large. The current public goods provision neither meets the needs of rural economic development nor supports the establishment of utilities or public undertakings, thus failing to satisfy the comprehensive development needs of rural society.

6. Weak Development and Low Service Capacity of Social Organizations

Social organizations serve as vital platforms and carriers for providing services in rural ethnic minority areas and are indispensable components of rural governance (Fang Suqing, 2018)[22]. In recent years, under the guidance of Party-building efforts, rural areas in Dehong have seen the emergence of various "Party-building +" social organization models, injecting fresh energy into local governance. However, their overall number remains small, with uneven industrial and geographic distribution. According to surveys, many associations and cooperatives exist in name only, lacking substantive activity. Some do carry out operations, but their coverage is limited, serving only a small fraction of farmers and falling far short of governance requirements. Most are concentrated in animal husbandry and specialty crop cultivation, driven by economic interests, which inevitably reduces their social governance function. Furthermore, public-interest social organizations focused on rural and agricultural services remain underdeveloped, with low service levels and minimal influence (Shen Quanping, 2019)[23].

7. Challenges in the Inheritance of Ethnic Traditional Culture

Ethnic customs and culture play a vital role in uniting communities and maintaining social stability in rural governance, often guided by rules of human sentiment. However, with social transformation and openness, the "familiar society" once based on blood ties and ethnicity is gradually being replaced by a "semi-familiar" or even "stranger" society (Chen Yunluan, 2020)[24]. As individualism rises, villagers' sense of belonging to the rural community diminishes, resulting in atomized rural development (Chen Yunluan, 2020; LI Wei & Zhang Hongxia, 2022)[24][25]. The diversification of goals and interests has torn apart traditional order, eroding traditional moral norms rooted in ethnicity. It has led to increasing internal division, declining social cohesion, and a weakening of community consciousness. The traditional rural moral concept of valuing righteousness over profit has gradually faded. Personal relationships and community ethics are being replaced by market transactions and contractual norms, with interpersonal relations becoming increasingly utilitarian. Consequently, the role of ethnic culture in self-governance and moral governance is now in crisis.

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3. Strategies and Recommendations for Rural Governance in Dehong Prefecture

Rural revitalization entails the comprehensive rejuvenation of rural society, politics, economy, culture, and ecology. Rural governance aims to address issues related to the "Five Revitalizations" (五个振兴) and must adhere not only to the general principles of national rural governance but also to the differentiated principles arising from border-region and ethnic characteristics. From the following aspects, we can expand the scope of rural governance, build consensus, explore more effective methods and tools, and realize the integration of "external impetus" and "internal activation," thereby constructing a high-quality rural governance system and a new pattern of rural governance characterized by co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits.

3.1 Strengthening the Rural Governance Team

Rural governance is government-led, villager-centered, and cadre-dependent. It is essential to focus on grassroots governance forces such as township officials, village Party branches and committees ("two committees"), and rural Party members. Only by firmly grasping these key personnel can we build a dynamic and capable core team for rural governance.

First, we must select and appoint competent township Party and government leaders and strengthen the leadership team to enhance political leadership. Second, we should integrate law enforcement resources by forming a comprehensive administrative enforcement team, streamlining administrative enforcement responsibilities, and fully implementing the grassroots administrative reform of "one team for enforcement." Third, we need to strengthen the selection and training of capable Party secretaries and "two committee" members at the village level. Fourth, outstanding cadres should be assigned to villages and managed effectively to ensure that the first secretaries and working teams stationed in villages play their due role and help improve village-level management capacity. Fifth, the rural Party member team should be reinforced to utilize their familiarity with local conditions and ethnic languages to enhance communication with villagers and promote policies. A points-based management system for Party members should be implemented to bring their vanguard role into full play. Sixth, we must develop a strong team of full-time and part-time grid workers, clarify their duties, and ensure the implementation of compensation policies, thereby strengthening the foundation of rural governance and providing solid support for rural revitalization (Fourth Batch of National Rural Governance Model Cases, 2023) [26].

3.2 Improving and Optimizing the Organizational System

The effectiveness of rural governance depends on a sound and optimized organizational system. It is necessary to further deepen standardized construction, reinforce the leadership of Party organizations, and clarify their core position in rural governance. By integrating various governance resources, a rural governance system that combines self-governance, rule of law, and rule by virtue can be established, transforming disordered governance into well-ordered processes. Through the optimization of organizational structures, clarification of responsibilities, and reinforcement of oversight mechanisms, rural governance can be made more efficient and refined.

Furthermore, support should be enhanced from strong to weak villages, rich to poor villages, and large to

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small villages. Efforts should also be made to promote joint construction between urban and rural Party organizations. A vertically integrated and efficiently executed organizational system must be established. A scientific and effective assessment mechanism should also be created. For villages with outstanding contradictions, weak economic foundations, and ineffective Party organizations, targeted assistance measures must be formulated (Fourth Batch of National Rural Governance Model Cases, 2023) [26].

3.3 Establishing a Sound Cadre Training System

Rural governance cadres are the most direct and fundamental executors of national policies. Their understanding and implementation capacity directly affect the effectiveness of governance. Moreover, the composition of governance teams is diverse, ranging from civil servants and staff of public institutions to volunteers and village officials, whose levels of policy understanding and application vary significantly.

Given rapid societal changes and the swift evolution of digital technologies, continuous training is crucial for governance cadres. Regular thematic training sessions, the use of online learning platforms, and policy interpretation articles should be promoted to ensure rural cadres fully grasp policy implications and implement them in a lawful and regulated manner. Training models should be innovated and channels expanded. A four-tier training system covering prefecture, county, township, and village levels should be built to achieve routine, wide-ranging, and effective training.

3.4 Consolidating the Foundation of Collective Economic Development

As Marxist theory asserts, the economic base determines the superstructure, which in turn reacts upon the economic base. In rural areas, the level of productivity and the nature of production relations—constituting the economic base—directly influence governance structures. An effective governance model can stimulate economic vitality; otherwise, it becomes a constraint (Zhang Tiansuo, Zhao Changbao, Zhang Haiyang & Li Guanyou, 2018) [27].

The collective economy stands as the most vital component of the rural economy and serves as a key pillar of rural governance. To begin with, it enhances the cohesion and influence of village Party organizations and the “two committees,” encouraging the participation of multiple stakeholders, including enterprises, banks, respected locals, farmers, and volunteer organizations. This multifaceted engagement enhances governance capacity through coordinated efforts and regulated interactions. Secondly, collective economic organizations have advantages in integrating resources and managing policy-driven agricultural funding, projects, and coordination. Thirdly, in balancing the interests of village collectives and individual villagers, the collective economy highlights the leadership of grassroots Party organizations while allowing villagers to benefit from the value-added benefits of collective assets. Through a hybrid distribution system based on both labor and capital contributions, villagers can share in the collective’s growth (GAO Ming & Jiang Fan, 2024) [28].

3.5 Leveraging Modern Technology to Improve Governance Techniques

Grid management is a proven method in rural governance. The grid system must be further refined with an optimized layout and clearly defined responsibilities. Guided by grid-based management and socialized services, a grassroots comprehensive service management platform should be built to efficiently respond to

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the diverse and multi-level demands of rural residents (Fang Suqing, 2018; Zhou Ziyun, Chen Minghong, Wu Junqiao, TANG Yan & Zhang Mingzhen, 2014) [22][29][30].

A "large platform + micro-governance" model should be promoted, utilizing platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, QQ, and others to reshape governance processes and tools. These platforms enable governments to better understand public needs, serve villagers more effectively, and facilitate grassroots democratic participation, particularly for migrant workers. Thus, they become new tools for civic engagement and innovation in rural governance.

3.6 Strengthening Institutional Development and Enforcement

To institutionalize and standardize rural governance, it is imperative to formulate and implement sound regulations. Clear job descriptions and task lists should be established for village-level governments and cadres, ensuring that responsibilities are precisely defined within established boundaries. In executing these duties, strict adherence to rules must be maintained. Village-level democratic decision-making systems should be strengthened, along with effective supervision mechanisms and agency services for village affairs, to ensure the effectiveness of these institutions [25].

A whistleblower reward mechanism for rural governance should also be introduced to enhance oversight by both organizations and the public. Efforts should be made to harness traditional organizational resources and moral forces based on kinship, clan ties, and ethnic customs. Reputation, trust, and moral mechanisms should be utilized to form, maintain, and govern rural public order, thereby fostering a harmonious and orderly rural environment.

3.7 Promoting National Ethnic Culture to Foster Governance Innovation

Ethnic culture serves as a spiritual force for rural development. First, the cultural values of ethnic minority communities in Dehong should be thoroughly explored and integrated with contemporary themes to form a unique cultural appeal. This not only fosters a deeper cultural identity and confidence among villagers but also promotes a sense of national unity, playing a vital role in inspiring rural revitalization.

Second, local cultural inheritors should be identified and cultivated, and rural cultural teams should be organized to conduct cultural activities. These efforts not only help preserve and enrich ethnic heritage but also strengthen Party and government policy advocacy, enhance villagers' sense of ownership, and encourage active participation in rural governance. The moral influence of such culture can guide behavior and uphold community norms.

Conclusion

Rural governance in Dehong exhibits distinct characteristics of "rurality," "ethnicity," and "borderland." However, by identifying key points of intervention—such as party leadership, governance subject construction, capacity building, collective economy development, technological empowerment, institutional enforcement, and cultural innovation—it is possible to improve resilience, capacity, and the overall level of rural governance. This will provide robust support for the construction of Dehong as a model demonstration zone

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for rural revitalization.

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