
Characteristics and Driving Forces: Structure and Decline of Rural Market Systems in Modern Ningxia

Shen YuJin^{1*}

1 Tianfu College of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Mianyang, Sichuan, China

*Corresponding author, E-mail: 943517034@qq.com

Abstract:

The unique agro-pastoral economy and multiethnic social structure of modern Ningxia gave rise to a rural market system that differed significantly from those of China's inland regions. Drawing upon Republican-era local gazetteers, travel accounts, and field investigation records, this study examines the structure of rural markets from three perspectives: market types, market periodicity, and the factors underlying their rise and decline. The findings indicate that rural markets in modern Ningxia developed into a diversified system composed of ordinary periodic markets as the foundation, specialized markets as distinctive features, and temple fairs as complementary trading venues. Although the periodicity of these markets generally followed the nationwide pattern, their density was substantially lower than that of Jiangnan and North China, reflecting a relatively underdeveloped level of market formation. The decline of the rural market system resulted from the combined effects of multiple forces. Warfare and natural disasters sharply reduced the population and weakened market demand; heavy taxation, monopolistic policies, and military exactions imposed by warlord regimes increased transaction costs; meanwhile, the widespread prevalence of usury and opium cultivation accelerated peasant impoverishment and undermined the economic foundations of rural exchange. This study demonstrates how natural conditions, political instability, and social transformation jointly shaped the evolution of rural markets in northwestern China, offering a regional perspective on the historical development of China's rural market economy.

Keywords:

Modern Ningxia; Rural Markets; Periodic Market System; Economic History; Regional Society

1.Introduction

Rural markets constituted one of the most important institutional foundations of the traditional Chinese rural economy. Beyond facilitating the circulation of agricultural products and daily necessities, they also connected rural communities with regional commercial networks and reflected broader patterns of economic and social transformation. Since the pioneering work of G. William Skinner on China's marketing system, the organization, hierarchy, and regional characteristics of rural markets have become central topics in Chinese economic and social history. Existing studies have demonstrated that the distribution, density, and functions

of rural markets varied considerably across regions in response to differences in geography, transportation, agricultural production, and administrative organization.

Compared with the prosperous market networks of Jiangnan and North China, however, the rural markets of Northwest China have received relatively limited scholarly attention. Modern Ningxia presents a particularly distinctive case. Situated at the transitional zone between agricultural and pastoral regions, Ningxia was characterized by a fragile ecological environment, frequent natural disasters, and a multiethnic population composed primarily of Han, Hui, Mongol, and other ethnic groups. These geographical and social conditions shaped a rural market system that differed markedly from those found in the economically developed regions of eastern China. Rather than forming a dense and hierarchical marketing network, rural markets in Ningxia generally remained small in scale, widely dispersed, and heavily dependent upon local production and transportation conditions.

Although previous scholarship has examined Ningxia's commercial history, agricultural economy, and regional society, most studies have focused on urban commerce, long-distance trade, or individual commercial centers. Systematic investigations of rural market organization remain scarce. Existing research rarely analyzes the structural characteristics of rural markets from the perspectives of market types, market periodicity, and mechanisms of development and decline, nor does it adequately explain how natural, political, and social factors interacted to shape market evolution in this frontier region. Consequently, the historical trajectory of rural market development in modern Ningxia remains insufficiently understood.

To address these gaps, this study draws upon a wide range of historical sources, including Republican-era local gazetteers, travel accounts, field investigation reports, and statistical materials. Combining historical textual analysis with comparative and quantitative approaches, it reconstructs the rural market system of modern Ningxia and examines its structural characteristics from three dimensions: market categories, market periodicity, and the driving forces behind market prosperity and decline. Particular attention is paid to the interaction among ecological constraints, political instability, and rural socioeconomic change in shaping market development.

This study argues that the rural market system of modern Ningxia represented a highly localized and dependent form of market organization. Unlike the relatively integrated marketing systems observed in eastern China, its evolution was constrained simultaneously by environmental conditions, transportation limitations, state fiscal policies, military conflicts, and transformations in the rural economy. By revealing the regional diversity of China's historical market systems, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of rural commercialization in Northwest China and provides new empirical evidence for comparative studies of regional market development in modern Chinese economic history.

2. Materials and Methods

To reconstruct the historical landscape of rural markets in Ningxia during the modern era, this paper constructs a multi-faceted historical source system, primarily based on local gazetteers and supplemented by travelogues and field investigations.



Local gazetteers are the core foundational historical source of this paper. The Ningxia Provincial Gazetteer, Shuofang Circuit Gazetteer, and various county-level interview records compiled during the Republican era, with their sections on "Establishment" and "Food and Commodities," detail the distribution of market towns, market cycles, and trade. Compared to official histories, local gazetteers focus more on the micro-level records of grassroots society. However, given the political turmoil in Ningxia during the Republican era and the rushed compilation of gazetteers, some data may be incomplete. Therefore, this paper adopts a "cross-verification method," comparing different versions of local gazetteers and records from different years to eliminate errors and strive for data accuracy.

Modern travelogues and field investigations provide valuable "on-site" perspectives. While works like Lin Pengxia's *A Journey to the Northwest* and Lin Jing's *A Record of Investigations in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, and Ningxia* bear the authors' subjective biases, their vivid descriptions of market atmosphere, commodity structure, and currency circulation break through the rigidity of official local chronicles, providing crucial corroborating evidence for reconstructing the micro-level realities of market operations.

Methodologically, this paper follows a paradigm combining history and economic geography. First, it employs historical document analysis, conducting close textual readings of historical materials to analyze market organization, trading entities, and rules, revealing the underlying social power structure. Second, it uses quantitative historical methods to systematically statistically analyze data such as the number of markets and their opening dates. By calculating market density per unit area, it quantitatively assesses the degree of development and makes horizontal comparisons with contemporary North China and Jiangnan regions to highlight its regional characteristics. Through this organic combination of historical materials and methods, this paper strives to establish a balance between macro-level data and micro-level narratives, systematically examining the rural markets of modern Ningxia.

3.Results and Discussion

3.1 Types and Scale of Rural Markets in Modern Ningxia

Ningxia is located in a remote area of Northwest China. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, it was under the jurisdiction of Gansu Province. After 1929, it became an independent province. Its administrative area consisted of the eight counties (Ningxia, Ningshuo, Zhongwei, Pingluo, Lingwu, Jinji, Yanchi, and Zhenrong) formerly under the jurisdiction of Ningxia Circuit of Gansu Province, as well as the territory under the jurisdiction of Ningxia Military Governor (Alashan Banner and Ejin Banner). [1] Although Ningxia was closed and backward, due to the development during the Ming and Qing dynasties, by the Republic of China period, it had formed an economic zone centered on Yinchuan, which combined agriculture and animal husbandry. At the same time, Ningxia has multiple ethnic groups, including Han, Hui, Manchu, and Mongolian. The production, lifestyle, customs and beliefs of each ethnic group are different, which has led to the formation of different types of markets in the area, namely general markets, specialized markets and temple fairs. The main function of ordinary markets is to facilitate the exchange of goods between residents of different villages, while specialized markets are responsible for the trading of special or local products. Temple fairs, on the other hand, are more about folk activities and entertainment, with trade being only a secondary function.

3.1.1 Ordinary Markets

Ordinary markets were the most common form of periodic rural trade in modern Ningxia and played a central role in the circulation of commodities within rural society. A market may be defined as a public place where buyers and sellers gather at a fixed location and at regular intervals to conduct commercial transactions.[2] Information recorded in the Shuofang Circuit Gazetteer of Ningxia Province and Fu Zuolin's Survey of Ningxia Province provides a relatively comprehensive picture of rural markets in Ningxia during the 1930s.

Table 1. Statistics of Rural Markets in the Counties of Ningxia during the 1930s^①

County	Number of Markets	Market Density (markets/100 km ²)	Average Population per Market	Average Market Service Area (km ²)
Ningxia	4	0.05	17,196	1,872.5
Ningshuo	3	0.04	17,454	2,289.7
Zhongwei	7	0.07	12,616	1,325.9
Pingluo	7	0.07	9,285	1,325.9
Lingwu	4	0.12	9,543	846.5
Jinji	4	0.11	9,137	936.5
Yanchi	4	0.19	4,209	525.5
Zhenrong	4	0.08	6,242	1,187.0
Total	37	0.09	10,710	851.7

As shown in Table 1, Ningxia has 37 rural markets, with a market density of 0.09 per square kilometer. Each market has an average population of 10,710 and a coverage area of 851.7 square kilometers. Zhongwei and Pingluo counties have the most rural markets, with 7 each. Ningxia, Lingwu, Jinji, Yanchi, and Zhenrong counties follow with 4 each. Ningshuo County has the fewest, with only 3. Yanchi County has the highest density of rural markets, at 0.19, averaging one market per 525.5 square kilometers, making it the most convenient for surrounding residents and indicating the best market development. Ningxia and Ningshuo counties have the sparsest markets, with densities of only 0.05 and 0.04 respectively, averaging one market per 1872.5 square kilometers and 2289.7 square kilometers, making them the most inconvenient for surrounding residents and indicating the worst market development. This conclusion drawn from the data seems inconsistent with common sense.

Looking back at the history of these two counties, Ningxia and Ningshuo were both attached to the capital of the prefecture during the Qing Dynasty. After the establishment of the Republic of China, Ningxia Prefecture was renamed Shuofang Circuit, and the two counties remained attached to it. After the establishment of Ningxia Province, the provincial capital became the former Shuofang Circuit seat. From Ningxia Town in the Ming Dynasty to Ningxia Prefecture in the Qing Dynasty, and then to the seat of Shuofang Circuit and Ningxia Province in the Republic of China, Ningxia has always been the political, economic, and cultural center of northern Ningxia, with a high population density. Logically, as its attached counties, Ningxia and Ningshuo should have had a relatively high level of economic development, at least not lower than other counties. If reflected in the development level of rural markets, it should at least be comparable to other regions. However, according to statistics, Ningxia and Ningshuo are far behind other counties.

^① Data were compiled and calculated by the author based on Shuofang Circuit Gazetteer of Ningxia Province and Fu Zuolin's Survey of Ningxia Province.



The reason for this is that the rural areas of Ningxia and Ningshuo counties are relatively close to the provincial capital. The capital of Ningxia Province was the former Shuofang Circuit. At that time, within the Shuofang Circuit, "the Four Archways, commonly known as the Four Drum Towers, were located on Dashizi Street, a thoroughfare with a wide variety of goods, serving as the central point of the city; the rice market was on the west side of the Four Archways; the mule and horse market was north of the new street entrance; the charcoal market was south of the mutton street entrance; the sheep market was in front of the city garrison; the pig market was at the South Gate; the chaff market was west of the capital; the East Firewood market was on Drum Tower Street; the West Firewood market was on Zhenwumen Street; the vegetable market was south of the capital; the foreign goods market was south of the Four Archways; the old timber market was west of the chest and cabinet market; the new timber market was south of the circuit office; the used clothing market was at the mutton street entrance; the hemp market was east of Shizi; and the chest and cabinet market was west of the Guanda Street entrance. [3] Therefore, the prosperity of the market in Ningxia's provincial capital at that time extended far beyond Ningxia and Ningshuo counties. Farmers from the two counties could directly go to the provincial capital, which had a wide variety of goods, to trade. It was reasonable that there were fewer rural markets.

According to the data in Table 1, and comparing the rural markets in Ningxia with those in Jiangnan and North China, the average radiation area of each market in Ningxia is 851.7 square kilometers, meaning there is one market for every 851.7 square kilometers. At that time, there was one market for every 36 square kilometers in Jiangnan, and one market for every 193 square kilometers in North China. [4, 5] Compared with Gansu and Qinghai provinces, which are also in the Northwest region, Gansu province has one market for every 542 square kilometers, and Qinghai province has one market for every 5642 square kilometers. [6] In comparison, the density of markets in the Jiangnan region is nearly 24 times that of Ningxia; in North China, it is 4.4 times that of Ningxia; in Gansu it is 1.6 times that of Ningxia; and in Qinghai it is 0.15 times that of Ningxia. This shows that the development level of rural markets in Ningxia in modern times was far lower than that in Jiangnan and North China, and also lower than that in neighboring Gansu Province. The only province that could surpass it was Qinghai Province, which has a larger area and a more backward economy.

3.1.2 Specialized Markets

A specialized market is a place that focuses on spot wholesale and concentrates the trading of a certain type of commodity or several types of commodities with strong complementarity or substitutability. Due to the unique geographical conditions and products of Northwest China, specialized markets featuring furs and medicinal materials have been formed in modern times. Ningxia is the most famous for its fur trade, "producing more than 900,000 catties of wool, more than 300,000 catties of camel hair, more than 5,000 catties of mutton, more than 170,000 sheepskins, more than 23,000 cowhides, more than 3,000 camel hides, and more than 1,400 horsehides annually, with the Tan sheepskin being the most prized in the country." [7] Shizuizi, located in Pingluo County, formed a specialized fur market because it was situated on a major transportation route to Inner Mongolia. "Various trades gathered here to buy furs from Gansu and Qinghai. After being combed and packaged, they were transported to Baotou by camel or wooden boat. The annual output was about one million furs and about 30 million catties of wool." [8] In addition, Ningxia is also rich in medicinal herbs such as wolfberry and licorice. There are professional markets selling wolfberry in Ning'anbao in Zhongwei Coun-

ty and Wuzhongbao in Lingwu County; and there is a professional market selling licorice in Yanchi County.[6]

3.1.3 Temple Fairs

The term "temple fair" refers to a gathering held on a specific date, based on a temple, to worship deities, trade goods, and entertain oneself. It is another form of rural market. Scholars generally believe that temple fairs originated in the Wei and Jin Dynasties, were basically established in the Tang Dynasty, and developed widely in urban and rural areas after the Song Dynasty. [2] Temple fairs are not only places for local residents to worship various deities and enjoy cultural entertainment, but also places for villagers to trade and exchange goods.

According to historical records, the earliest record of temple fairs in Ningxia can be traced back to the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty. According to the Wanli edition of Shuofang Xinzhi, "On the 28th day of the third month of spring, incense is burned at the Dongyue Temple; on the 8th day of the first month of summer, monks and nuns from various temples hold a purification ceremony. On the 13th day of the fifth month, people gather at the Guan Yu Temple and the City God Temple to worship, and all kinds of goods are traded. On the 7th day of the first month of autumn, women also hold a Qiqiao Festival, where needlework, tea, and fruit are presented." Besides major temple fairs such as the Dongyue Temple, Guan Yu Temple, and City God Temple, various temples held purification ceremonies on the 8th day of the fourth month each year, and all temple fairs involved the trade of various goods. By the Qing Dynasty, temple fairs in Ningxia had become even more prosperous, with the duration and scale of major temple fairs increasing, and various theatrical troupes competing to perform. During the Republican era, in the Ningxia provincial capital and surrounding areas, there were the Dongyue Temple Fair on March 28th, the purification ceremony at Tuta Temple outside the West Gate on the 8th of early summer, the Guansheng Temple Fair on May 13th, the City God Temple Fair on the 15th of the lunar calendar, the Qixi Festival (Double Seventh Festival) for those seeking skill in needlework, and the Double Ninth Festival for climbing mountains. In places like Shaanxi Temple, Zhengjue Terrace, and Haizi Lake in Yongning County, people would use the temple fairs for market trade, but no fixed market day was formed. [9] In Zhongwei, there were as many as 35 temples in the county seat alone. Among them, the temple fairs of Gaomiao Temple, Xiangyan Temple, City God Temple, and Laojun Terrace were relatively large. Local residents and believers from neighboring counties would come to worship and make donations during the temple fairs. Larger temple fairs would also invite opera troupes to perform. During the temple fairs, merchants would gather to sell various small commodities, and commercial activities were very active. [10]

3.2 Market Periodicity of Rural Markets in Modern Ningxia

The market cycle is the fixed interval between market days in rural areas. Due to the dispersed rural population and low purchasing power, farmers' buying and selling activities are significantly intermittent, insufficient to maintain the threshold requirements for fixed commerce, thus characterized by periodicity and mobile trade. For merchants, the total demand encompassed by any single rural market area is insufficient to provide them with the profits necessary for survival. By periodically changing their location, merchants can absorb the demand of several market areas, thereby achieving their survival goals. For the vast majority of farmers, the market cycle is a way to avoid long journeys to obtain the goods and services they need. [11]



Generally speaking, markets can be divided into regular markets, periodic markets, and irregular markets based on their opening cycles. Regarding the periodic spectrum of rural markets in China, American scholar Skinner provided a fairly detailed description in his book *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China*. [12] The cyclical types of rural markets in modern Ningxia can be roughly divided into regular markets, three markets per ten days, and one market per ten days. In terms of the order of market cycles, it is basically consistent with the rural markets in other parts of the country, that is, regular markets are traded every day; three markets per ten days are held on the 1st, 4th, and 7th, 2nd, 5th, and 8th, 3rd, 6th, and 9th of each ten-day period; and one market per ten days is held on the 1st, 10th, and 20th of each month. The specific market periods in each county are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Periodicity of Rural Markets in the Counties of Modern Ningxia^②

County	Number of Markets	Daily Markets	Three Markets per Ten-Day Period	One Market per Ten-Day Period ^c
Ningxia	4	2	2	0
Ningshuo	3	1	2	0
Zhongwei	7	5	2	0
Pingluo	7	2	3	2
Lingwu	4	1	3	0
Jinji	4	4	0	0
Yanchi	4	3	1	0
Zhenrong	4	3	1	0
Total	37	21	14	2

According to Table 2, among the markets in Ningxia's counties, 21 markets (57%) were regular markets; 14 markets (38%) had three markets every ten days; and 2 markets (5%) had one market every ten days. This shows that regular markets were the main type of market in rural Ningxia in modern times, followed by those with three markets every ten days. Regular markets were mostly located in county towns and offered a wide variety of goods. For example, in Ningshuo County, "dozens of shops lined the streets, trading daily, with no shortage of any goods"; and in Jinji County, "dozens of shops lined the streets, trading daily, attracting merchants from all over." Markets with three markets every ten days were mostly located in densely populated fortified villages, some of which were quite prosperous. For example, in Wuzhong Fortified Village in Lingwu County, "dozens of shops lined the streets, trading every three, six, and nine days, and the market was extremely bustling with people shoulder to shoulder"; and in Lijun Fortified Village in Ningshuo County, "dozens of shops lined the streets, trading every two, five, and eight days, and it was considered very prosperous." [2] Markets held every ten days are relatively rare, with only two locations, both in Pingluo County: one in Pingluo city and the other in Shizuishan. The reasons for the formation of the market periods in the two locations are different. The market period in Pingluo city was formed by inheriting old customs. According to the Ningxia Prefecture Gazetteer of the Qianlong era, There is one market in this city, which trades on the 2nd, 22nd, and 12th of each month." Even in the Republic of China era, it was still "trading on the 2nd of each month." The market in Shizuishan also had the factor of inheriting old customs, but it also played an important role in inter-provincial and inter-ethnic trade. "Shizuishan was a route to Mongolia, and in the past, it

^② Data were compiled and calculated by the author based on Shuofang Circuit Gazetteer of Ningxia Province and Fu Zuolin's Survey of Ningxia Province.

^③ A "ten-day period" (xun) refers to the traditional Chinese division of a lunar month into three ten-day intervals.

traded with Mongolia three times a month, with the locals trading on the 1st, 10th, and 20th of each month." [12] During the Republican era, Shizuishan became an important fur distribution center in Ningxia due to its geographical location, and residents of Hui, Han, and Mongolian ethnic groups also traded goods there.

3.3 The Rise and Decline of Rural Markets in Modern Ningxia and Their Causes

During the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns of the Qing dynasty, Ningxia experienced a period of relative political stability and steady economic growth under Qing administration. This situation changed dramatically with the outbreak of the Muslim Uprising in Shaanxi and Gansu during the Tongzhi reign (1862–1877), when warfare quickly spread into Ningxia Prefecture. Contemporary accounts described the devastation as "nine out of every ten households were left deserted," reflecting the severe population losses caused by the conflict. [13] Following the suppression of the uprising, Ningxia's economy gradually recovered. At the same time, the establishment of the wool and fur trade between Ningxia and Tianjin, together with the opening of foreign trading firms at Shizuizi in Pingluo County, further stimulated regional commercial development. Shizuizi subsequently emerged as a specialized market for the trade in wool and animal hides. By 1926, on the eve of the establishment of Ningxia Province, the number of rural markets had reached 37.

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, however, interrupted this recovery. Following the Japanese occupation of North China, the traditional commercial route linking Ningxia with Beijing and Tianjin through Baotou was severed. Goods exported from Ningxia were forced to travel south through Guyuan and then westward to Lanzhou, substantially increasing transportation costs and reducing commercial efficiency. The deterioration of transport conditions seriously hindered commercial development. Beginning in the autumn of 1938, the Ma Hongkui government, under the pretext of preventing strategic materials from reaching the enemy, imposed state monopolies on pastoral products such as wool and hides, as well as local specialties including licorice and goji berries. These commodities were purchased at prices considerably below prevailing market values, placing severe pressure on the agricultural and pastoral economy. As a consequence, rural markets entered a period of decline. As recorded in the Zhongwei County Gazetteer, "during the later Republican period, most rural markets became increasingly depressed." [10]

The prosperity of regional markets is closely associated with both economic development and population size. The evolution of rural markets in modern Ningxia largely paralleled broader economic trends in the region, experiencing decline during the late Qing period, a brief recovery in the early and middle Republican era, and renewed deterioration during the later Republican period. Overall, the long-term trajectory was one of gradual decline. Three principal factors contributed to this historical process.

3.3.1 Warfare and Natural Disasters Led to a Sharp Population Decline

The Tongzhi Hui Rebellion in Shaanxi and Gansu, which broke out in 1862, reduced the population of Gansu from 15.2 million to 3.5 million. Ningxia Prefecture, which was also part of Gansu Province at the time and was the core area of the uprising, also saw a significant decrease in population. From 1928 to 1930, a severe drought struck the Northwest region, affecting more than 2.4 million people. According to Skinner's theory, the size of the grassroots market system changes in the opposite direction to population density. In sparsely populated areas, the market area must be larger in order to have sufficient demand to maintain the market. [12] The decrease in population inevitably leads to a decrease in population density, which in turn



leads to the decline of rural markets in modern times.

3.3.2 Excessive Taxation under the Warlord Regime Severely Damaged the Rural Economy

Farmers' purchasing power declined. Since the Republic of China, Ningxia has been under the control of various warlords, who levied exorbitant taxes under various pretexts, imposing a heavy burden on farmers. According to the survey, there were as many as 42 kinds of exorbitant taxes in Ningxia in the 1930s. [14] Since ancient times, oppressive government has been more ferocious than a tiger. Under the heavy pressure of exorbitant taxes, many farmers could not make ends meet. At that time, farmers in Zhongwei County were so poor that their homes had "a stove, a pile of manure and straw, a pair of sand jars with several rolls of black moss in them, no grain for rats to eat, a broken earthen bed with two tattered burlap sacks and three small yellow sheepskins, which served as their bedding, and nothing else of value." [15] This shows how poor the farmers were. After Ma Hongkui took control of Ningxia, he implemented the "one out of three able-bodied men" and "two out of five able-bodied men" conscription system to expand his army. By the eve of liberation, one in every 7.5 people in Ningxia was a soldier. To avoid military service, people either deserted or mutilated themselves. The heavy conscription directly led to a loss of rural labor, and the damage to rural productivity was self-evident. The rural economy declined, farmers became impoverished and lost their purchasing power, resulting in a continuous decrease in the frequency of market transactions, which directly affected the development of rural markets.

3.3.3 Widespread Usury and Opium Cultivation Accelerated Rural Bankruptcy

Under the oppressive rule of warlords, many farmers were forced to resort to usury. According to feedback from a 1934 survey of agricultural conditions in Ningxia conducted by the Nanjing Nationalist Government, the cash debt ratio of Ningxia farmers at that time was 51%, and the grain debt ratio was 47%, indicating a very high debt ratio. Borrowing at high interest rates in a state of poverty was tantamount to drinking poison to quench thirst. Many farmers could not repay their loans even after a year's harvest, and were forced to borrow new money to repay old debts, falling into a vicious cycle with no hope of escape. [16] When Ma Fuxiang governed Ningxia, due to a lack of military funds, he broadly lifted the ban on opium, stipulating that those with 10 mu of land could plant 3 mu of opium, and each mu could yield 70 taels of opium, half of which was to be paid as taxes, and the other half kept for himself. In 1925, Feng Yuxiang controlled the Northwest. In order to seize military funds, he openly ordered the planting of opium throughout the province and imposed a "fine on opium plantations". After Ma Hongkui took control of Ningxia, he continued to implement the "fine on opium plantations," forcing farmers to plant opium. Under the "promotion" of the warlords, the planting area of opium in Ningxia once reached 200,000 mu. [17] This led to "most residents being addicted to opium" [8]. The high cost of opium smoking made the already poor farmers even worse off. At the same time, opium poisoning also eroded people's physical and mental health, making people unwilling to work. A large number of farmers went bankrupt due to usury and opium. The market lost farmers who were both consumers and producers. Its decline was self-evident.

4. Conclusions

This study has systematically examined the types, market periodicity, and historical evolution of rural markets in modern Ningxia, leading to three principal conclusions.

First, modern Ningxia's rural markets exhibited significant underdevelopment and spatial imbalance. Their market density was far lower than that of the Jiangnan region, North China, and even neighboring Gansu Province, and their distribution was extremely uneven. The provincial capital, with its powerful commercial service functions, exerted a clear "siphoning effect" on surrounding counties, inhibiting the natural formation of grassroots markets.

Second, the market's operating model reflected both traditional and dependent attributes. On the one hand, the cyclical system, dominated by regular and periodic markets, reflected its basic function as a traditional grassroots market in facilitating regional trade. On the other hand, specialized markets, represented by furs and medicinal herbs, forcibly embedded Ningxia into the capitalist world market system through foreign firms' acquisition and export chains, reducing it to a mere raw material supplier, resulting in a highly fragile and dependent economic structure.

Finally, the overall decline of the markets was the result of a confluence of factors. The sharp decline in population caused by war and famine shook the foundation of market demand; while the warlord government's exorbitant taxes and economic policies, as well as the rampant usury and opium, completely stifled the vitality of the rural economy from both institutional and social perspectives. The tragedy of the rural market in Ningxia in modern times was not caused by natural economic cycles, but rather a microcosm of the systematic destruction of a regional economy under internal and external pressures.

References

- [1]Zhou, Z.H.; Li, C.X. General History of China's Administrative Divisions: Volume on the Republic of China; Fudan University Press: Shanghai, China, 2007; p. 419; ISBN: 9787309056044.
- [2]Zhang, X.W.; Zhang, Y.F. Thematic History of the Republic of China, Volume 8: Local Politics and Rural Transformation; Nanjing University Press: Nanjing, China, 2015; pp. 238, 241; ISBN: 9787305102622.
- [3]Ma, F.X. Shuofang Circuit Gazetteer of Ningxia Province; Chengwen Publishing House: Taipei, China, 1968; pp. 305–306.
- [4]Shan, Q. Research on Rural Market Towns in Modern Jiangnan. *Modern Chinese History Studies* 1998, (6), 120–137.
- [5]Gong, G. The Development of Rural Markets in Modern North China. *Modern Chinese History Studies* 2001, (1), 141–167.
- [6]Huang, Z.L. Rural Markets in Modern Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. *Modern Chinese History Studies* 2004, (4), 123–156.
- [7]Lin, P.X. Travels in Northwest China; Gansu People's Publishing House: Lanzhou, China, 2003; p. 192; ISBN: 9787226023631.
- [8]Lin, J. An Investigation of Mongolia, Xinjiang, Gansu, and Ningxia; Gansu People's Publishing House: Lanzhou, China, 2003; p. 49; ISBN: 9787226028827.



-
- [9]Yongning County Gazetteer Editorial Committee. Yongning County Gazetteer; Ningxia People's Publishing House: Yinchuan, China, 1995; p. 212; ISBN: 9787227015284.
- [10]Zhongwei County Gazetteer Editorial Committee. Zhongwei County Gazetteer; Ningxia People's Publishing House: Yinchuan, China, 1995; pp. 204, 427; ISBN: 9787227014386.
- [11]G. William Skinner. Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China; China Social Sciences Press: Beijing, China, 1998; pp. 12, 14–19, 42; ISBN: 9787500416920.
- [12]Zhang, J.C.; Yang, H.Y. Qianlong Ningxia Prefecture Gazetteer; Ningxia People's Publishing House: Yinchuan, China, 1992; pp. 202–205; ISBN: 9787227006862.
- [13]Xu, A.L.; Yang, X.D. Economic History of Ningxia; Ningxia People's Publishing House: Yinchuan, China, 1998; pp. 235–236; ISBN: 9787227018100.
- [14]An, H.; Li, Z.F. Agricultural Survey of Northwest China; National Northwest Agricultural College: Nanjing, China, 1936; p. 50.
- [15]Chen, G.Y. Inspection Tour of Northwest China; Gansu People's Publishing House: Lanzhou, China, 2002; p. 101; ISBN: 9787226023648.
- [16]Gao, S.G. Usury and Rural Society in Northwest China during the Twentieth Century; China Social Sciences Press: Beijing, China, 2011; pp. 167–168; ISBN: 9787500495857.
- [17]Li, J.G. On the Opium Problem in Northwest China in Modern Times. Journal of Xinjiang University(Philosophy and Social Sciences) 2005, (6), 77–81, DOI:10.13568/j.cnki.issn1000-2820.2005.06.016.03:49.