

An Exploration of Rural Governance Patterns in Liaoning Province since the Reform and Opening Up

Jialei Li *

International Business College, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, Dalian, China,
116012

* Corresponding Author Email: 18640089912@163.com

Abstract. This paper examines the evolution of rural governance models in Liaoning Province, China, following the implementation of reform and opening-up policies, with particular emphasis on the "county center village conduct" model and its adaptation and innovation in local governance contexts. Employing a qualitative research methodology grounded in Marxist theories of rural governance, this study systematically analyzes the historical development and operational efficacy of rural governance structures in Liaoning Province. Through comprehensive case study analysis, the research identifies critical challenges, including limitations in village cadre professionalization and issues of rural population hollowing, while proposing strategic recommendations for systemic, institutional, and human resource reforms. The implications of this study extend beyond regional boundaries, offering valuable insights and practical governance strategies that could inform rural revitalization efforts in comparable agricultural regions globally. This research thus establishes a foundation for both theoretical advancement and practical implementation of effective rural governance systems in the context of comprehensive rural vitalization.

Keywords: Rural Governance, Reform and Opening Up, County Center Village Conduct, Rural Collaborative Governance.

1. Introduction

China has a large rural population, and the development of rural society has historically served as a pivotal driver of national progress, playing an indispensable role in the country's development trajectory. With the ongoing advancement of rural reforms, the rural governance model has continuously evolved and innovated. This evolution is crucial not only for maintaining rural stability and fostering development but also for directly influencing the effectiveness of rural revitalization strategies. Liaoning Province, a significant region in Northeast China, boasts extensive arable land and a large agricultural workforce. The evolution and development of rural governance models in Liaoning hold considerable theoretical and practical significance. The Liaoning Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Areas emphasizes the acceleration of building a strong agricultural province, setting development targets for 2025 and 2035. By examining the rural governance model in Liaoning, this study explores the application and innovation of the "county-centered village governance" model in local governance, offering valuable insights for rural governance in other regions of China and globally.

Since the reform and opening-up, China's rural governance has accumulated significant experience. Scholars have conducted extensive research on the structure and development of rural governance from various perspectives, including governance ideologies and frameworks.

Firstly, the Marxist perspective on rural governance elucidates the fundamental principles governing the historical development of human society, providing ideological support and a theoretical foundation for rural governance. The concept of agricultural cooperation has facilitated the transition from an inefficient smallholder economy to a more stable and harmonious socialist collective economy. Additionally, the notion of communal autonomy has laid a solid foundation for democracy, enabling China to establish a genuine working-class government and achieve self-governance. Furthermore, the concept of peasant development is a critical component. In the context of Russia, Marx emphasized that after the proletariat assumes power, it is essential not only to

disseminate policies but also for grassroots political entities to effectively transform peasant ideologies.

Secondly, the ruling party in China has demonstrated a commitment to learning from and innovating upon Marxist theory. Since the reform and opening-up, rural areas have witnessed the emergence of self-governing organizations, such as villagers' committees, which implement self-management, self-education, and self-service. This new model of rural governance, characterized by "village government and village rule," is a practical manifestation of Marx and Engels' concept of communal self-governance. These initiatives have established both the material and popular foundation for rural governance in China.

Building on this foundation, this paper employs a qualitative analysis approach, drawing on concepts related to the "rural governance model" and "reform and opening-up." From a Marxist perspective, the paper conducts an in-depth study of the development of rural governance in Liaoning Province since the reform and opening-up, analyzing the current status and challenges of the rural governance model, and proposing strategies to promote its development in line with the unique characteristics of Liaoning. This study aims to provide a reference for the development of a suitable and modernized rural governance system for China and offer valuable insights for the broader global community.

2. Rich experience of rural governance in China since the reform and opening up

Since the initiation of reform and opening-up policies, the rural reform characterized by the implementation of the household responsibility system has significantly propelled the liberation and development of rural productive forces, resulting in transformative changes in rural socio-economic development [2]. Concurrently, Liaoning Province has amassed substantial experience in rural governance and agricultural development, achieving notable progress under the guidance of appropriate policies, concepts, and principles.

Firstly, policy-driven initiatives have acted as a catalyst for the advancement of rural governance. Since the reform and opening-up, the state and government have introduced a series of policies aimed at promoting rural revitalization. The Liaoning "14th Five-Year Plan" for the Modernization of Agriculture and Rural Areas explicitly outlines the goal of achieving decisive progress in rural revitalization and realizing basic modernization of agriculture and rural areas by 2035. The Liaoning Three-Year Action Program for New Breakthroughs in Comprehensive Revitalization (2023-2025) sets forth the key tasks, ten strategic initiatives, and safeguarding measures to foster new breakthroughs in comprehensive revitalization through modernization in a way that aligns with Chinese characteristics. These policies provide a robust institutional framework for rural governance, supported by high-level national endorsement.

In terms of policy implementation pathways, Liaoning Province has progressively enhanced its rural governance capacity by improving rural infrastructure, promoting the integrated development of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries in rural areas, and strengthening rural ecological and environmental protection. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, Liaoning focused on advancing agricultural modernization, building a modern rural industrial system, and supporting initiatives such as "one village, one product," strong agricultural industry towns, and modern agricultural industrial parks.

Secondly, the people-oriented development concept has provided a theoretical foundation for the effective practice of rural governance. Since the reform and opening-up, China has consistently adhered to the principle of prioritizing farmers and respecting their initiatives. In recent years, Liaoning Province has launched several model countryside construction programs, including the "Most Beautiful Courtyard" publicity and broadcasting initiative, the "Five Good and Two Pleasant" Harmonious Countryside Pilot Planning, and the "Thousand Villages Demonstration" project. These

efforts have encouraged farmers to actively engage in improving the rural environment and managing public affairs, stimulating rural residents' enthusiasm for participating in rural construction.

Thirdly, historical experience has led China to adopt the principle of steady development. Since the reform and opening-up, rural areas in Liaoning Province have adhered to the national reform strategy of "from pilot to whole," establishing a balanced approach to reform, development, and stability. In the process of agricultural modernization, Liaoning has gradually improved agricultural production efficiency by piloting new technologies and models. Recently, the province has explored a steady path for agricultural and rural modernization by innovating investment and financing models for the construction of high-standard farmland and launching the "Black Soil Grain Silo" program. This approach not only avoids the pitfalls of "Great Leap Forward"-style blind expansion but also provides a sustainable development path for rural governance.

Throughout the process of rural governance and agricultural development, Liaoning Province has significantly strengthened its governance capacity. Farmers' incomes have continued to rise, and rural revitalization has yielded remarkable results. In 2024, Liaoning's grain output reached 50.1 billion kilograms, accounting for 3.6% of the national total, which is crucial for national food security. Meanwhile, the per capita disposable income of rural residents reached 22,700 yuan, and the urban-rural income ratio narrowed to 2.11, reflecting a gradual improvement in quality of life. Regarding the integrated development of rural agriculture, culture, and tourism, 64 villages and counties in Liaoning Province were selected for China's Beautiful Leisure Villages and National Leisure Agricultural Key Counties Project from 2010 to 2024, representing 3.2% of the total number of selected counties nationwide. This highlights the significance of the people's aspirations for a better life in comprehensively promoting rural revitalization and accelerating the construction of an agricultural powerhouse. Furthermore, these efforts provide a solid foundation for the further development of rural governance in Liaoning Province and offer strong support for the subsequent implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

3. Current Situation of Rural Governance Model in Liaoning Province

3.1. History and Characteristics of the Development of Rural Governance Structure in Liaoning Province

3.1.1. The People's Commune Period (1958-1978): Unity of Government and Society and Integral Control

During this period, the rural governance model in Liaoning Province was primarily shaped by the people's commune system, which embodied the principle of the "unity of government and society." The Resolution on the Establishment of People's Communes in Rural Areas, issued in 1958, outlined the size, organizational structure, ownership form, and distribution system of people's communes. This system facilitated comprehensive state control over the political, economic, cultural, and social management of rural areas through a three-tiered organizational structure comprising communes, production brigades, and production teams.

A notable example of the people's commune system's success is the Shuiyuan People's Commune in Yingkou County, Liaoning Province. The commune effectively transformed saline depressions into a prosperous fish and rice township, achieving comprehensive development across agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, by-products, and fisheries. This transformation was largely made possible by the people's commune system, which enabled large-scale collective labor and centralized planning.

However, while this model successfully supported industrialization, it also constrained farmers' autonomy and motivation, leading to insufficient economic and social vitality within rural society.

3.1.2. Early period of reform and opening up (1978-1990): the household responsibility system and the "county center village conduct" model

The reform and opening-up policies served as a catalyst for the transformation of the rural economic system, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the people's commune system. In its place,

a new grassroots rural governance mechanism, known as the "county-centered village governance" model, emerged in Liaoning Province. This model delineates a division of responsibilities, where the township government exercises national administrative power, while villagers at levels below the township engage in self-governance [3].

In October 1983, China issued the Circular on the Separation of Administration and Society and the Establishment of the Township Government, emphasizing the need to separate administrative functions from societal roles and to establish township governments. By the end of September 1984, Liaoning Province had completed the separation of government and society and the establishment of township governments. During this period, the introduction of the household responsibility system significantly mobilized farmers' enthusiasm for production, fostering the recovery and development of the rural economy. From 1978 to 1984, China's grain output increased from 305 million tonnes to 407 million tonnes, reflecting a 100-million-tonne increase. This substantial growth highlights the effectiveness of the household responsibility system in boosting agricultural productivity, thereby laying a solid foundation for rising farmers' incomes and advancing the modernization of agriculture and rural areas.

3.1.3. The period of transition to a market economy (1990-2010): adjustment and deepening of the rural governance model

Since the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policies, the gradual marketization of rural economic systems in Liaoning Province has exerted a profound influence on villages historically dependent on conventional agricultural practices. The introduction of a modern market economy has substantially reshaped the sociopolitical structures of traditional rural communities. As a result, rural governance in Liaoning has evolved from a centralized, administration-driven framework to a more participatory and pluralistic model involving multiple stakeholders. This shift has facilitated the emergence of a new rural development paradigm, integrating diverse market entities—including enterprises, capital investors, large-scale farms, and agricultural cooperatives—thereby enhancing land-use efficiency and promoting intensive agricultural production.

In several regions of Liaoning Province, the tripartite "enterprise + cooperative + farmer" model has played a pivotal role in advancing contract-based agricultural production. This approach has significantly contributed to the modernization and industrial upgrading of key sectors such as animal husbandry and marine fisheries. Beyond improving agricultural productivity, this model has stimulated economic diversification in rural areas, fostering a more dynamic and resilient economic ecosystem. Such developments align with broader national strategies for rural revitalization and sustainable development, demonstrating the transformative potential of market-oriented reforms in reshaping rural socioeconomic landscapes.

3.1.4. Rural Revitalisation Strategy Implementation Period (2010-present): Public Service Logic and Rural-Urban Integration Development

(1) Rural Revitalisation Strategy: A New Opportunity for Innovation in the "county center village conduct" model

In 2017, China formally launched its rural revitalization strategy, establishing a comprehensive framework for rural development with defined objectives and key initiatives. In response, Liaoning Province has enacted a series of targeted policies to advance rural revitalization, focusing on industrial upgrading, the Digital Rural Construction and Development Project, and the Rural Construction Action. Aligned with the national guidelines of "thriving businesses, a livable environment, social civility, effective governance, and shared prosperity," the province has made significant strides in modernizing rural governance systems [4].

At the implementation level, Liaoyang District has emerged as a notable case study, demonstrating the transformative potential of digital governance in rural areas. By developing a supervisory platform for rural collective assets, resources, and funds (commonly referred to as the "three capitals"), the district has achieved digitally enabled management of these critical economic components. This innovation exemplifies the successful integration of digital technologies into rural governance,

enhancing transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency in the administration of collective resources.

(2) Innovative models of governance: from “county center village conduct” to “rural collaborative governance”

Since the inception of China’s reform and opening-up policy, rural community governance has undergone significant transformation in response to shifting socioeconomic conditions, evolving from the traditional "county-centered village administration" model to a more participatory "rural collaborative governance" framework [5]. This transition reflects broader systemic reforms aimed at enhancing governance efficiency and inclusivity.

The Decision of the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China further underscored the imperative to "improve the urban-rural grassroots governance system, integrating self-governance, rule of law, and moral guidance under the leadership of Party organizations, while refining a social governance system characterized by co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits." This policy directive has catalyzed the engagement of multiple stakeholders in rural governance, marking a paradigm shift from "unilateral governance" to "pluralistic co-governance."

A notable example of this governance innovation can be observed in Shanshen Village, Linghai City, where the ‘Shenyinong’ Agricultural Products Professional Cooperative has adopted the "village collective + cooperative + farmers" model. This approach has not only stimulated the growth of the village collective economy but also significantly increased villagers' incomes. Moreover, such institutional innovations in rural governance have enhanced farmers' productivity awareness and engagement, elevated living standards, and advanced the modernization of rural governance structures.

3.2. Innovative exploration of gural governance models in Liaoning province

In recent years, Liaoning Province has carried out many innovative explorations in digital villages, grass-roots management and layer of party building leadership, and reform of production methods, and has achieved remarkable results, while also facing some challenges.

3.2.1. Digital village construction

The digital transformation of rural governance requires systematic coordination at the county level, where strategic utilization of local resources enables the development of comprehensive digital application scenarios. This approach facilitates the integration of multiple governance domains and the enrichment of agricultural data repositories, thereby establishing a robust foundation for evidence-based policy formulation and scientific decision-making [6].

Institutionalizing this transformation, Liaoning Province has implemented the "Data Elements ×" Three-Year Action Plan (2024-2026), which articulates clear developmental objectives centered on two key dimensions: the digitalization of agricultural industries and the industrialization of digital transformation, with data elements serving as the fundamental driver. To operationalize this strategic vision, provincial authorities have established synergistic partnerships with leading telecommunications enterprises, notably Liaoning Unicom, to architect a comprehensive "1+1+N" digital village framework. This innovative system design enables the creation of a multifunctional digital governance platform specifically engineered to accelerate agricultural digital transformation.

Complementing these structural developments, Liaoning Province has initiated targeted pilot programs in digital rural governance. A paradigmatic case emerges from Panshan County in northern Panjin City, where advanced digital technologies have been systematically deployed in facility agriculture. The implementation of intelligent environmental monitoring systems, incorporating precision sensors for temperature and humidity regulation, has enabled data-driven agricultural management. This technological integration yields dual benefits: significant enhancement of operational efficiency and substantive advancement of sustainable agricultural practices. The Panshan County demonstration effectively illustrates the transformative potential of digital solutions in contemporary rural governance modernization and agricultural production optimization.

3.2.2. Grassroots management innovation and party building leadership

The modernization of grassroots governance constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for achieving national prosperity and strength. In Liaoning Province, this process has been systematically advanced through Party-building leadership, which facilitates the deep integration of rural industrial development with urban and county-level social governance. This approach has crystallized into an innovative "Party-building + industry" governance model that effectively promotes rural governance modernization.

Empirical evidence from Liaoyang County illustrates this transformation. The former Du Village has implemented a "human security + technical security" management framework, wherein the village is partitioned into 10 meticulously designed grids, each overseen by a dedicated full-time grid operator. This structural innovation has enabled precision in grassroots management, optimizing both service delivery and administrative efficiency. Complementing these efforts, Panjin City has leveraged policy interventions to accelerate the digital transformation of grassroots governance. By promoting the application of 5G and big data technologies across 49 critical information systems—encompassing Party-building initiatives, general administration, and traffic management—the city has established an intelligent governance infrastructure. This strategic integration of advanced technologies exemplifies how digital innovation can enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of grassroots governance systems.

Collectively, these case studies demonstrate Liaoning Province's multifaceted approach to governance modernization, combining organizational innovation with technological advancement to establish a replicable model for rural revitalization and sustainable development.

3.2.3. "Cooperatives + rural governance" model

Liaoning Province has pioneered an innovative "cooperative + rural governance" model that effectively integrates economic development with governance capacity building. A representative case is the Xiangnong Agricultural Machinery Service Cooperative in Liaoyang County, which has implemented a "service + technology + training" approach to develop and disseminate advanced corn cultivation techniques, resulting in consistent yield increases exceeding 15% for both members and neighboring farmers, thereby contributing to regional food security. Concurrently, Shuiquan Township in Kazuo County has adopted a multidimensional "Party branch + cooperative + industrial base + farmers" framework that has successfully incorporated 58 impoverished households (114 individuals) while establishing a multifunctional ecological park combining agricultural production, agro-tourism, and environmental education. These initiatives demonstrate how cooperative-based governance models can simultaneously enhance agricultural productivity, alleviate poverty, and promote sustainable rural development through institutional innovation and technological dissemination, offering valuable insights for rural revitalization strategies in developing regions.

3.2.4. Reform of the land system and property rights system

The rural land system reform in Liaoning Province has achieved significant progress through the implementation of the "three rights separation" framework (collective ownership, household contracting rights, and land management rights) and comprehensive collective property rights system reforms. By establishing clear property rights for 5.17 million hectares of arable land through household-level certification, the province has created a solid foundation for agricultural modernization. These institutional innovations have facilitated the emergence of new agricultural business entities while improving land transfer mechanisms through enhanced county and township fiscal systems. The reforms have effectively addressed longstanding issues of inefficient land transfer and low mobility among smallholder farmers, leading to optimized utilization of rural land resources.

The economic impacts of these reforms are evident in the province's agricultural performance indicators. In 2024, farmers' per capita disposable income reached 22,700 RMB, representing a 5.6% year-on-year increase. This growth demonstrates the tangible benefits of the institutional changes implemented across Liaoning's rural sector. The income improvement reflects both enhanced agricultural productivity and more efficient resource allocation enabled by the reformed land system.

Regarding collective property rights reforms, Liaoning has established a comprehensive institutional framework for rural collective economic organizations. By the end of 2020, over 12,000 villages had completed property rights system reforms, achieving the critical separation of collective asset ownership from operational management rights. This institutional transformation has provided necessary safeguards for the modernization and upgrading of rural collective economic organizations, creating conditions for more market-oriented operations while maintaining collective ownership structures.

Building upon this foundation, our analysis identifies several key characteristics of Liaoning's current rural governance model. The system demonstrates notable strengths in resource mobilization and collective action coordination, particularly in implementing large-scale agricultural projects and infrastructure development. However, challenges remain in addressing the professionalization deficit among rural cadres and mitigating the effects of rural hollowing-out. These structural constraints highlight the need for continued institutional innovation, particularly in human capital development and social governance capacity building.

The Liaoning case offers valuable insights into the complex process of rural institutional reform during China's economic transition. The province's experience demonstrates how carefully designed property rights reforms can simultaneously enhance agricultural productivity, increase rural incomes, and maintain social stability. However, the persistence of certain governance challenges suggests the need for more comprehensive approaches that address both economic and social dimensions of rural development. These findings contribute to broader discussions on rural institutional innovation in developing economies undergoing similar transitions..

4. Causes and optimization of major problems in rural governance in Liaoning province

4.1. The establishment of simulation model

4.1.1. Analysis of phenomena and causes

The professionalization of village governance encompasses two dimensions: first, the administrative control exerted by state power over village-level organizations, leading to the erosion of their independence and autonomy under the oversight of grassroots governments; and second, the professionalization and formalization of internal management within village-level organizations, including the bureaucratization of village cadres [7]. In Liaoning Province, the issue of village cadre professionalization has emerged, impacting the progress of rural reform. The reasons for this phenomenon are analyzed below.

First, the responsibilities of rural cadres are often ambiguous, with a pronounced trend toward professionalization. The duties of rural cadres typically encompass administrative tasks such as land contracting and village affairs, which should fall under villagers' self-governance but are instead managed by cadres with administrative authority. In some rural areas of Liaoning Province, village cadres are required to fulfill numerous tasks assigned by township governments, including the allocation of low-income household quotas, the selection of candidates for village-level public welfare positions, and the improvement of rural living environments. This has shifted their role from guiding villagers' self-governance to acting as *de facto* representatives of township governments, effectively transforming village self-governance institutions into extensions of township government operations.

Second, the selection mechanism for village cadres is imperfect, and there are problems of rent-seeking and corruption. The selection of some village cadres is often plagued by rent-seeking and corruption, leading to the promotion of unqualified personnel or the marginalisation of qualified personnel. Village cadres in some villages in Liaoning Province are completely detached from the administrative system, and therefore need to be governed by state policies, village party organisations and villagers to improve the status quo. In some villages in Liaoning Province, the salaries of village cadres have been incorporated into the government's financial system, and the work of village cadres

has been gradually professionalised, but this professionalisation has not been accompanied by a sound selection mechanism, and may have exacerbated the possibility of rent-seeking.

4.1.2. Solutions

The administrativeization of rural cadres can be effectively mitigated through a comprehensive approach encompassing institutional reforms, procedural mechanisms, and talent development. First, Liaoning Province must reinforce village autonomy by establishing robust systems for self-governance, clearly delineating the roles and responsibilities of rural cadres to prevent administrative overreach. A promising model can be observed in Jiande City, Zhejiang Province, where a service-oriented governance framework integrates digital platforms with grassroots administration. By developing an online-offline service system coupled with credit-based incentives, Jiande has successfully mobilized villager participation in local governance, thereby revitalizing the endogenous dynamics of rural self-rule.

Second, refining the selection mechanism for rural cadres is critical to curbing rent-seeking and corruption. Villages must implement transparent and standardized recruitment protocols, ensuring that candidate evaluation incorporates input from villagers, township officials, and relevant departments. Such participatory selection processes enhance the legitimacy and accountability of appointed cadres, fostering public trust in local governance structures.

Furthermore, enhancing the competency of rural cadres through targeted training and talent recruitment remains indispensable. A sustained commitment to cadre capacity-building—including skill development programs and merit-based performance assessments—can mitigate administrative tendencies while improving governance efficacy. Concurrently, villages should institute fair and transparent evaluation systems to minimize opportunities for corrupt practices and ensure that promotions align with demonstrated competence rather than patronage.

Nevertheless, despite the implementation of villager councils and talent cultivation mechanisms in Liaoning Province, operational challenges persist. Rural hollowing-out, driven by the exodus of working-age populations, has depleted the pool of active participants in self-governance, undermining the formation of a cohesive autonomous environment. Additionally, low civic engagement among some villagers—manifested in weak democratic awareness and limited enthusiasm for communal affairs—hampers the functionality of participatory institutions. These issues are not unique to Liaoning but reflect broader, systemic hurdles in China's rural governance landscape. Addressing them demands coordinated, multi-stakeholder efforts to refine policy design and execution, ensuring alignment with the strategic objectives of rural revitalization.

4.2. Analysis of experimental results

4.2.1. Analysis of phenomena and causes

This paper refers to the study of Wei et al. [8] to explore the rural population outflow, which in turn reflects the degree of rural social shelling. From the perspective of the trend of urban-rural population change, with the increase of urbanisation level, the trend of rural labour force, especially young adults, migrating and moving out of the province in Liaoning Province is very obvious. However, the growth rate of the urbanisation rate of the resident population in Liaoning Province from 2018 to 2022 is low, with an average annual increase of 0.68 percentage points, much lower than the national average Table.1.

Table 1. Urbanisation Rate and Growth Rate of China's Resident Population, 2018-2022

Region	Urbanisation rate of resident population (%)					Annual rate of increase (%)			
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
China	61.5	62.71	63.89	64.72	65.22	1.21	1.18	0.83	0.5
Liaoning	70.26	71.21	72.14	72.81	73	0.95	0.93	0.67	0.19

In terms of permanent residents, Liaoning Province saw its rural permanent population decline by 250,000 people at the end of 2023 compared to 2022, a year-on-year decrease of 2.21%. The population mainly flowed to urban areas within the province or to other provinces, resulting in abnormal outflow of rural population. In addition to the continuous outflow of rural population, the intensification of aging, and the labor shortage in rural areas caused by population outflow have also constrained rural industries, especially the development of rural digitalization.

The reasons for this situation are largely due to the lack of endogenous economic vitality in rural areas and irrational land use patterns since the reform and opening up [9]. First, the better living environment and infrastructure in cities have attracted rural population to urban areas, while the backward infrastructure and limited prospects in agriculture have become driving factors for the outflow of rural population. However, the revitalization and development of rural areas cannot be separated from the involvement of versatile agricultural information technology talents. The phenomenon of young and middle-aged people seeking employment outside their villages and the insufficient knowledge reserves of returning young people have to some extent affected the digital development of rural construction in Liaoning Province. The loss of talent has further led to the "hollowing out" of the spiritual life of some rural residents and the "hollowing out" of rural construction, especially cultural and civic construction. Second, the separation of village collectives from farmers and land has led to a lack of concern for rural public affairs, which in turn has caused alienation between individual farmers and village collectives as well as grassroots rural governments, resulting in the prominent issue of rural hollowing out.

4.2.2. Solutions

The phenomenon of rural hollowing fundamentally originates from inadequate implementation of grassroots self-governance systems and the continuous outflow of local governance talent. Effectively addressing this challenge necessitates a comprehensive approach involving the restoration of authentic village-level self-governance, reconstruction of grassroots power structures, and implementation of talent attraction strategies to facilitate return migration and rural revitalization.

Regarding the reconstruction of grassroots governance systems, substantial government investment in addressing the "three rural issues" (agriculture, rural areas, and farmers) remains imperative. Following the implementation of Liaoning Province's 14th Five-Year Plan for Agricultural and Rural Modernization, systematic progress has been made in grassroots governance innovation. Notable initiatives including the "Three Changes" reform, the "10,000 Enterprises Revitalize 10,000 Villages" program, and the development of specialized rural industries have collectively contributed to rural modernization and economic transformation, enabling local residents to capitalize on land-based economic opportunities. Furthermore, the concept of "self-governance" in this context involves Party organizations mobilizing community participation in addressing local affairs and livelihood issues, thereby facilitating the development of new socialist countryside models. To strengthen oversight of grassroots power and enhance villagers' rights awareness, Liaoning has established clear procedural guidelines and detailed operational regulations for villagers' deliberative councils. The 2023 introduction of the "1+10" organizational measures package represents a significant institutional innovation designed to ensure grassroots power genuinely serves community interests.

The core element of rural revitalisation lies in the revitalisation of talents [10]. The human capital dimension of rural revitalization requires innovative talent recruitment strategies and systematic rural reconstruction efforts. As a key urban agglomeration area in China's eastern coastal region, Liaoning Province has prioritized strengthening functional linkages between urban cores and rural hinterlands. The province's adoption of a "balance of increase and decrease" land use policy has provided an effective mechanism for managing vacant rural settlements [9]. Complementary measures include establishing platforms for agricultural professional talent exchange, creating integrated mechanisms for agricultural industry chain development, and implementing incentive programs for public service professionals in rural areas. These initiatives collectively aim to accelerate the development of comprehensive rural talent pools. While China's rural practical talent pool exceeded 23 million by 2024, significant gaps remain in scientific, managerial, and public service expertise relative to the 2035

agricultural modernization targets. Ongoing institutional improvements and collaborative efforts between government and communities remain essential to address these persistent challenges in rural governance and development.

5. Conclusions

This paper investigates, analyzes, and synthesizes the evolution of rural governance in Liaoning Province under the "county center village conduct" model, employing qualitative analysis and integrating Marxist perspectives on rural governance. By conducting an in-depth examination of the historical development of rural governance models in Liaoning Province since the reform and opening-up, along with the associated challenges and solutions, this study highlights the critical role of rural governance in the province's rural reform. The central finding of this paper is that rural governance must address three key dimensions—system, mechanism, and talent—by enhancing the villagers' self-governance system, optimizing cadre selection mechanisms, and strengthening talent team development. These measures aim to resolve administrative issues in rural governance and elevate its overall effectiveness. Furthermore, the successful experiences in rural governance offer valuable insights for the economic development of Liaoning Province and the nation as a whole, contributing to rural advancement and facilitating the comprehensive implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

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