

Rural restructuring in Southwest China: Is change driven by targeted poverty alleviation?

Guifeng Xu

Hubei University of Automotive Technology, Shiyan, Hubei 442000, China

xugf@huat.edu.cn

Abstract: Targeted poverty alleviation (TPA) has effectively addressed the problem of absolute poverty in rural China. However, the rural restructuring resulting from this unconventional model of antipoverty and the sustainability of this restructuring need to be further tested. This study develops an analytical framework for the multidimensional transition of rural areas from the perspective of collaborative governance for poverty with multiple actors. We test our framework with a case study of Danzhai County, China. The results indicate that antipoverty actors created a benefit linkage mechanism for poor villagers through comprehensive land consolidation and the development of featured industries and cooperative societies and finally ended the traditional small-scale peasant economy system; however, the impact of TPA is still controversial because of issues such as elite capture in rural restructuring and the sustainability of industry in the postpoverty era.

Keywords: Targeted poverty alleviation (TPA); Rural restructuring; Collaborative governance.

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1. Introduction

Rural restructuring, which is closely related to macroeconomic and social restructuring on a massive scale, was constructed from critiques of traditional rural sociology at the end of the 20th century [1, 2]. After decades of development, the rural restructuring perspective has evolved from focusing on the nonagricultural economy that emerged in the transition from “productionism” to “postproductionism” in rural areas of the developed world to focusing on the multiple facets and locality of rural transition in the context of the global rural renaissance, thus forming a theoretical system based on the research paradigm of rural geography [2-7]. The implication of “rural restructuring” is consequently defined as a process of continuous change in rural areas; this change is influenced by factors such as the socioeconomic macroenvironment, technological progress and regional policies, while the result of this change is a “substantial reshaping” of rural areas in terms of spatial form, economic structure and social relationships [4, 8-10]. Although the literature on rural restructuring has focused mainly on developed countries and regions, in recent years, interest in research on similar issues in the context of developing countries and regions has increased [10, 11]. With the largest rural population in the world and rapid economic growth combined with large development gaps between regions, China provides many useful case samples for research on the restructuring of rural areas and the consequences of this restructuring at different stages [12].

Rural China has a long and vigorous history of restructuring in its own right [13]; since 1978, China has experienced a rapid and profound transition resulting from the implementation of a series of top-down reforms accompanied by globalization, industrialization and urbanization [11, 14, 15]. The influencing factors and restructuring features of rural change in contemporary China are distinctly regional and stage specific. The implementation of a household responsibility system in the late 1970s brought the agricultural sector back from collective management to small-scale production by individual owners; this change contributed to the economic liberalization of rural areas [16, 17]. By the 1980s, supported by policies encouraging the development of township and village enterprises,

rural enterprises in southeastern coastal regions, which had geographical and market advantages, rapidly emerged and enabled these rural areas to take the lead in industrialization, thereby resulting in a regional boom in China's rural economy [11, 18]. The reform of the household registration system in the 1990s loosened restrictions on rural population mobility, thereby greatly promoting the outward flow of rural laborers. With the rapid urbanization and abrupt rise of the eastern economy, economic leverage has subsequently had an unprecedented impact on population movement. Major economic disparities between regions have spawned a wave of migrant workers flocking from the West, especially the Southwest, to the East, thus leading to rural decay in western China, and rural issues (such as abandoned farmland, an aging population and "hollow villages") are materializing one after another [19-21]. Although the central government has introduced policies, such as "Reconstructing a New Village", "Increasing Urban Construction Land by Decreasing Rural Construction Land" and "Implementing the New-type Urbanization", since 2000, to solve the problems affecting village sustainability, agricultural security and farmers' rights [9, 13], the rural decline in the western region has not effectively improved.

These policies have had little effect in western rural areas, especially in southwestern mountainous areas, mainly because the tension between people and land has made it difficult for most families to maintain their family livelihoods through farming alone. As a result, many rural laborers who are young and skilled have chosen to work away from home, thus leaving the elderly and female populations to stay in villages and engage in scattered, small-scale and inefficient agricultural production, thus preventing these rural areas from advancing and leading them into poverty due to the lack of an endogenous force [3]. To solve rural poverty and revitalize the western countryside, the central government launched a targeted poverty alleviation (TPA) campaign in 2013 and mobilized all social forces to participate, thereby prompting an influx of capital, talent, technology and other elements into poverty-stricken rural areas in a short period [22]. This influx has profoundly affected these areas.

The TPA campaign achieved the goal of eliminating poverty among the rural poor under the current standards in 2020. However, have poor rural areas been restructured from decay as a result of the campaign? If a restructuring of poor rural areas has occurred, how did the campaign contribute to this reconstruction, and what features and problems have emerged? All these questions will be the focus of Chinese policy makers and scholars both currently and in the near future. Thus, this study attempts to explore and answer these questions on the basis of an example of a poverty-stricken county in Southwest China; this study proceeds as follows. In the next section, we describe the background and theoretical framework of this paper. We illustrate the history of rural poverty, trace the evolution of poverty alleviation in China and establish an analytical framework for rural restructuring affected by multiple actors in the context of TPA. In the third and fourth sections, we conduct an empirical case study, including the study area description, research methods and mechanism through which TPA influences rural restructuring and its characteristics. Finally, the discussion and conclusion are presented.

2. Background and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Poverty and Poverty Alleviation in Rural China

China once had the largest population living in rural poverty in the world, with 148 thousand villages identified as impoverished by the central government; this population represented 80% of all poor people [23]. Therefore, the problem of poverty has been a major barrier to socioeconomic development in rural China [24]. The government (at all levels) has made tremendous efforts to eradicate rural poverty since the introduction of the reform and opening up in 1978, and more than 700.0 million people in rural areas were lifted out of poverty by 2012 [25, 26], thus enabling China to become the first country to

halve the population living in extreme poverty [27]. However, the long-standing imbalanced development of regions, together with natural, social and institutional factors [27, 28], left approximately 82.49 million rural people living in poverty at the end of 2013 [29], and most of them lived in western China, where the poverty ratio exceeded 20%. These severely impoverished areas are clusters of mainly minority groups or old revolutionary bases, most of which are located in densely mountainous, ecologically vulnerable or disaster-prone areas [27, 30]. These impoverished areas have an obvious disadvantage in terms of location, which, combined with extremely scarce productive factors, means that living and production conditions are primitive. Thus, antipoverty policies had a limited impact on these areas because of the isolated island-type distribution of the poor and the marginal diminishing effect of poverty reduction [22, 28]. More broadly, poverty alleviation in these areas is no longer a simple technical arrangement of funds, projects and support for the poor but a systematic and complex social governance process.

In such a context, traditional antipoverty measures face enormous challenges [31], and a new mechanism of targeted assistance and development-oriented poverty reduction needs to be established through collaboration among governments, markets and all sectors of society. Therefore, in 2013, the central government adopted the TPA strategy, which changed the targeting of poverty alleviation from the regional and county levels to the village and household levels [22]. Consequently, rural poverty has greatly decreased, and the poverty ratio has decreased to 4.5% [32]. To achieve a “well-off society” by 2020, the central government initiated its battle against poverty in 2016 and mobilized all social forces, including government officials, university and college staff, and enterprises, to participate in the campaign [33]. During this period, more than 2.9 million stationing officials from government organs above the county level and from state-owned enterprises were delegated to increase poverty in poor villages [34], and over 20% of quoted companies made substantial contributions to the antipoverty campaign [35]. An overall pattern of TPA was thus formed in rural China, in which the leading group office for poverty alleviation and development implements dedicated poverty alleviation measures, which include promoting relocation and establishing poverty alleviation funds. Government departments are responsible for poverty alleviation through industry, which focuses on improving infrastructure and developing special industries. Social poverty alleviation includes east-west cooperation and business and individual engagement. As a result, a “trinity” (dedicated poverty alleviation, industry poverty alleviation and social poverty alleviation) antipoverty system has been formed with unified objectives, a clear division of labor, and mutual collaboration and support (Figure 1).

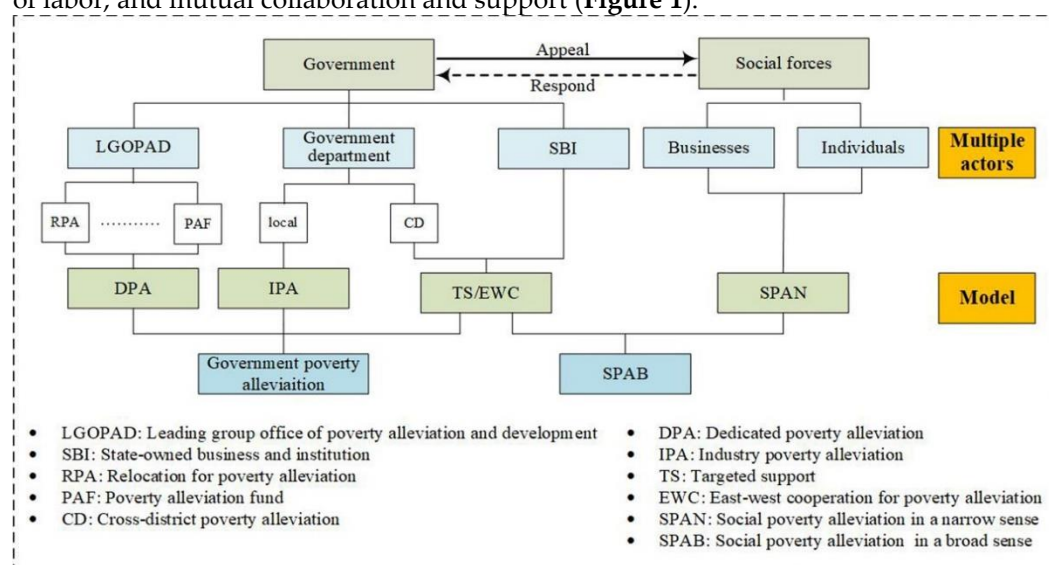


Figure 1. Overall pattern of TPA in rural China.

2.2. TPA with Multiple Actors: Implications for Rural Restructuring

TPA, as a guiding ideology for poverty alleviation and development in China over the past several years, is a concept associated with extensive poverty alleviation [22]. This concept suggests that the government (at all levels) should enroll social forces to participate in developing antipoverty projects and poverty governance activities. Consequently, local governments are encouraged to take flexible and targeted measures according to local conditions to transform traditional approaches to poverty eradication and drive endogenous development in poor areas. Business and market forces, which are judged to be important supplementary forces to local governments in the fight against poverty, are also guided by governments to use their market-based business strengths to help poverty-stricken areas develop industries and achieve inclusive growth. Social forces, such as businesses involved in poverty alleviation and development, are not subordinate to the government and do not follow the government's instructions but negotiate and cooperate with the government on the basis of the common goal of eradicating poverty. In other words, TPA could be considered a model of collaborative governance to address poverty with multiple actors. Ultimately, a benign system with multiple actors interacting to combat poverty has been formed in poverty-stricken areas under the TPA mechanism. As a result, supporting policies, funds, talent, technology and other external resources have been imported in large quantities in a short period, thus having a fundamental impact on the socioeconomic structure of rural areas and leading to multidimensional changes.

As stated above, the impacts of TPA on rural localities in poverty-stricken areas come from the actions of multiple actors: government intervention, business investment and individual engagement. In the model of collaborative governance for poverty alleviation, which is structured between the government and various sectors of society, the local government, social participants and the poor generally create a benefit linkage mechanism through comprehensive land consolidation. The change in land use is therefore the most intuitive expression of the impact of pro-poor development on rural socioeconomics. Local governments usually raise funds for urban development and infrastructure construction through land consolidation, including land acquisition, development, and transfer and resettlement, to guarantee sites for poverty alleviation industries and projects and to guide the large-scale development of agriculture [36-38]. By participating in government-promoted land consolidation projects, businesses can develop local high-quality resources to achieve industrial poverty alleviation goals [22]. Individuals, especially those government officials who are stationed in villages to help the poor, ensure the development of poverty alleviation projects or industries on the ground by assisting local governments and businesses in completing land transfer or acquisition during the implementation of specific poverty alleviation policies. The TPA ultimately established a mechanism of collaborative governance to combat poverty with multiple actors through the land consolidation platform, including the government, businesses and individuals, thereby having a profound impact on rural restructuring in poor areas (**Figure 2**).

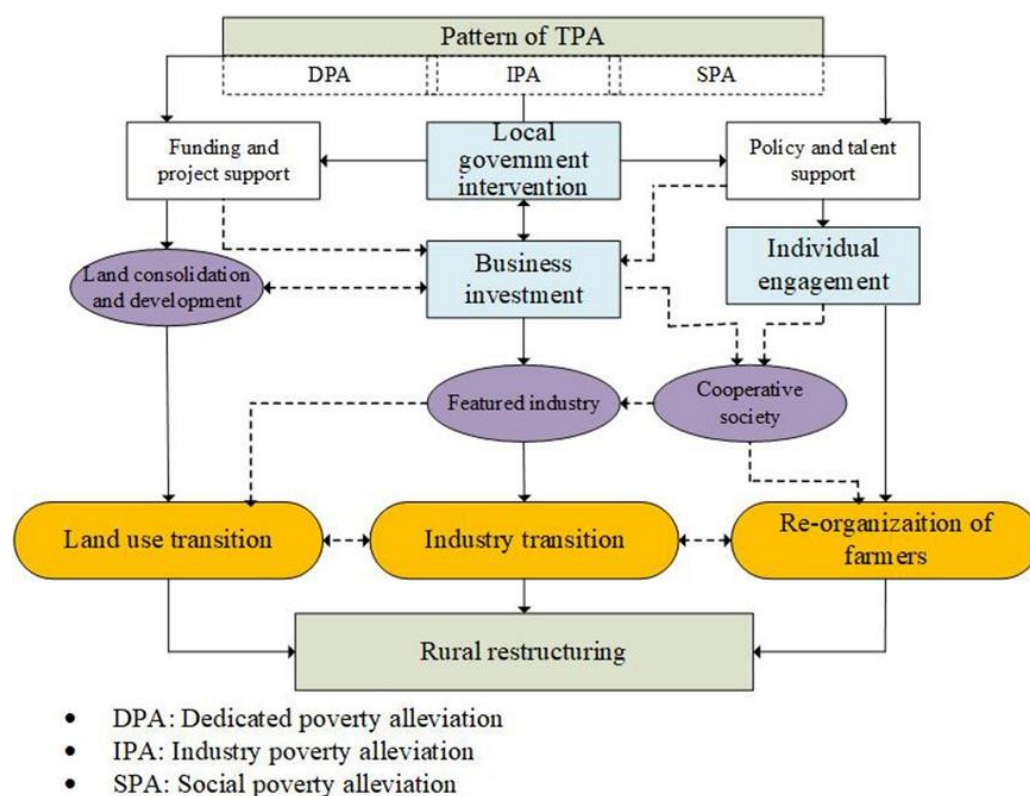


Figure 2. The influence mechanism of multiple actors on rural restructuring in the context of TPA.

The execution of government policies to alleviate poverty and support agriculture and the implementation of poverty alleviation programs, together with the business development of antipoverty projects, changed land use patterns and improved land use efficiency through land consolidation platforms, thus changing the rural landscape and promoting the reconstruction of rural space. In addition, the increase in and commercialization of agriculture and the nonagriculturalization of the economy have been two major trends in industrial poverty alleviation. By investing in modern agriculture and nonagricultural industries, businesses help poor areas activate endogenous development momentum, promote economic growth and eliminate poverty. As a result, business investment in poverty-stricken areas has destroyed the traditional small-scale peasant economic system, improved the marketability of local economies, and promoted the restructuring of the rural economy. Furthermore, under the guidance of policy encouraging talent to visit the countryside or return to one's hometown, government officials are participating in the governance of the rural community in the form of stationed assistance to solve the living and employment problems of the rural poor. Stationing officials integrate rural land, labor and other resources through the formation of poverty alleviation industrial cooperatives to improve the efficiency of agricultural production and the economic benefits of agricultural products, thereby helping the poor generate and increase their income. In this vein, pro-poor industrial cooperatives have reorganized villagers through a benefit linkage mechanism, and the intervention of stationing officials has changed the community governance system from that of a traditional village ruled by a rural sage.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Area

Danzhai County (26°19'-26°26'N, 107°44'-108°08'E), which is located in southeastern Guizhou Province, is a typical remote mountainous county on the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, with a mountainous area representing approximately 76% of the territory. Covering

an area of approximately 940 km², Danzhai is divided into 3 towns and 4 townships, which are subdivided into 126 administrative villages comprising 138,642 thousand permanent residents in 2020; Danzhai is also a multiethnic county. Miao, Buyi, Shui and 21 other ethnic groups have lived there for generations, and ethnic minority populations account for more than 80% of the total population. Danzhai belongs to the Guizhou karst mountainous area, where the ecological environment is fragile and experiences severe rocky desertification, thus leading to insufficient arable land and resulting in prominent conflicts between humans and land. Therefore, Danzhai was once one of the poorest counties in China and was dominated by traditional agricultural production; Danzhai's socioeconomic development has lagged far behind that of the rest of China. The gross domestic product (GDP) of Danzhai was 11.54 billion yuan in 2011; the per capita GDP was 6.859 thousand yuan, and the per capita annual net income of rural residents was 3.71 thousand yuan; these per capita values represent 19.55% and 53.17% of the national average, respectively, and the incidence of rural poverty was approximately 49.2%.

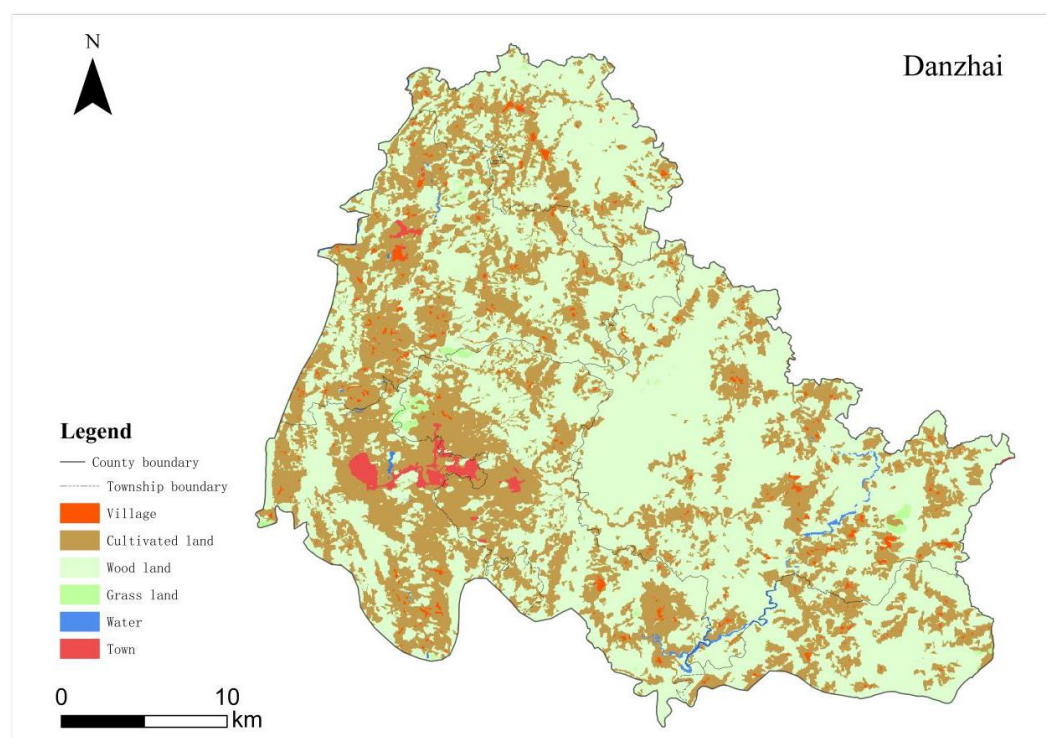


Figure 3. The current land use status of Danzhai County

Although the local government invested in major antipoverty efforts, Danzhai was still in extreme poverty due to the comprehensive interweaving of various factors, such as natural environmental constraints, historical problems and institutional defects, before the implementation of the TPA. In 2011, Danzhai was identified as a pilot area for regional development and poverty reduction in the rocky desertification area comprising Yunnan, Guangxi and Guizhou; this area is one of the fourteen concentrated poor areas with special difficulties (CPASDs) in China. In addition, 96 villages were identified as poor villages by the government; these villages included 14,528 poverty-registration households and 59,101 people, accounting for 33.83% of the total population in 2014. Since that time, Danzhai has attracted extensive attention throughout society and opened a new chapter in antipoverty efforts. Through the coordinated poverty alleviation investments of the government, businesses and NGOs, Danzhai finally eliminated poverty in 2019. According to local government statistics, the per capita annual net income of rural residents increased to 10.06 thousand yuan by the end of 2019; this figure represents an average annual rate

of 21.39% over the past ten years. As a result, the economic and social structure of Danzhai has undergone significant changes due to the combination of poverty alleviation and county economic development.

3.2. Data Sources

The social, economic, demographic and land use data used in the study came from “Sixty years in Guizhou Province (1949--2009)”, the “Statistical Yearbook of Danzhai County” (2010--2020), the “Government Work Report of Danzhai County” (2015--2020) and the “Land Use Change Survey in Danzhai County” (2000--2017). In addition, the current land use map of Danzhai County was obtained after verifying and correcting the 2020 land cover map of Danzhai (from GlobeLand 30) via visual interpretation on 2020 Google Earth high-resolution images (**Figure 3**).

3.3. Methods

On the basis of the framework of collaborative governance for poverty with multiple actors, this study analyzes the impact of the poverty alleviation actions of local governments, businesses and individuals on rural areas in three areas: land use change, industrial change and rural community organization change.

Land use changes include explicit morphological changes that characterize the attributes of land use quantity and spatial structure and implicit morphological changes that characterize the attributes of land property rights and operation methods [39-41]. By calculating the dynamic index of land use (Equation (1)) [42], we analyze the explicit changes in land use in Danzhai and explore the logic behind the changes in local governmental behavior. Then, we analyze the changes in implicit land use patterns, such as property rights and methods of operation for agricultural land, since the TPA and further analyze how the behavior of poverty alleviation actors impacts changes in rural land use.

$$K = (U_b - U_a)/U_a \times T^{-1} \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

where K represents the dynamic index of a land use type in a given area, that is, the annual change rate of the land use type, with positive values representing an increase in area and negative values representing a decrease in area. U_a and U_b represent the initial and final areas, respectively, for a given land use type. T represents the length of the study period and uses year as the unit of measure. This index is commonly used to measure the intensity of changes in land use structure.

The industrial structure can clearly reflect regional economic characteristics and is the most intuitive indicator for measuring changes in industrial development. In this study, the industrial structure ratio and the industrial structure entropy value (Equation 2) [43] are used to characterize the overall industrial changes and features of the study area. The impact of industrial poverty alleviation measures implemented by businesses on economic development is subsequently identified on the basis of the general trend in industrial changes.

$$H_i = \sum_{i=1}^n W_{i,t} \ln(1/w_{i,t}) \quad (2)$$

where H_i denotes the value of industrial structure entropy in period t , $W_{i,t}$ denotes the share of industry i in GDP in period t , and n denotes the number of industrial sectors. The larger H_i is, the weaker the synergy among industries and the more unreasonable the industrial structure; the smaller H_i is, the better the synergy among industries and the more reasonable the industrial structure. Therefore, H_i is an important indicator reflecting the evolutionary characteristics of the industrial structure.

Finally, the main impetus for organizational change in the rural community comes from the incoming nonresident population, and the intervention of stationing officials

from the government, in particular, has greatly affected the original model of village governance by village sages. Under pressure from the government's poverty alleviation performance assessment, stationing officials are strongly involved in village governance, and they make full use of the resources and information they possess to attract investment to villages so that social capital, public welfare organizations and other forces can participate in village poverty alleviation and development. These efforts by stationing officials have led to the entry of multiple forces into the village, thereby changing traditional community relationships and governance patterns and creating a new modern governance system. Starting from the poverty alleviation behavior of the stationing officials, the changes in the rural community are illustrated through a case highlighting a specific village in Danzhai.

4. Multidimensional Transition in Danzhai: The Impact of TPA with Multiple Actors

4.1. Land use Transition Driven by Government-led Developmental Poverty Alleviation

Danzhai experienced an "island effect" caused by factors such as a lack of resources and location disadvantages; this effect made government investment in the early stages an important driving force supporting the county's economic development. The local government used land consolidation projects to attract the participation of social capital in infrastructure construction and improve the efficiency of rural land use, thereby promoting urbanization and modernization to achieve poverty reduction. The dynamic index of land use in Danzhai shows that land use has been constantly changing over the past two decades, and the spatial morphology and functional transformation of each land type can be clearly characterized (**Table 1**). The dynamic index of construction land has been positive but has shown an increasing and then decreasing trend, especially after 2005. The construction land index has increased substantially, with the town and road components increasing the most; this increase is closely related to local government investment behavior. The central government formulated a policy liberalizing social capital investment in 2004; this policy allowed social capital to enter public utilities and other fields and encouraged local governments to create innovative governance models to attract such involvement. In this context, the local government promoted infrastructure construction through the BT (build and transfer) model, thereby producing a significant expansion of construction land during this period; similarly, the rapid slowdown in expansion after 2015 was associated with a decrease in government investment. Ecological land, such as forestland and grassland, trends downward due to the expansion of construction land, and although the decline is small, the total reduction is large because this land category represents a large total area. Forestland, for example, has been reduced by approximately 14 thousand hectares in the last two decades. Although the dynamic index of cultivated land was negative for most of the period, the total area of cultivated land changed less, mainly because in 2006, the central government established a cultivated land protection policy that enabled local governments to maintain a dynamic balance in the total amount of cultivated land through the Plus and Minus Hook programs between urban and rural construction land. Thus, the transformation of cultivated land use is better reflected in changes in cultivation structure and operation methods.

Table 1. Dynamic index (%) of each land use type.

	Construction land			Cultivated land	Woodland		Grassland	Water
	Town	Village	Transportation		Garden	Forest		
2000-2005	6.78	0.11	1.15	-0.30	3.89	0.05	-0.11	-3.42
2005-2010	29.01	0.77	21.09	3.55	4.18	-0.18	-0.06	-0.10
2010-2015	27.53	0.37	6.74	-0.29	1.65	-0.18	-0.13	-0.04
2015-2017	3.22	0.31	3.95	-0.09	-0.59	-7.89	-0.26	-0.09

The scarcity of cultivated land resources, the small and fragmented plots and the scattered layouts leading to the inefficient use of cultivated land are the main reasons for long-term poverty in Danzhai (**Figure 3**). As a result, land consolidation to increase the added value of land has become an important way for Danzhai to reduce poverty. Rural land consolidation in Danzhai began in 2013, when the central government implemented a land system reform that relaxed the conditions for rural land transfers and encouraged social capital to transfer land for breeding and farming development. Before this, the function of cultivated land was mainly to ensure the needs of farming families; the land was operated by traditional small farmers in a decentralized manner, and there were relatively few land transfers, which mostly took the form of inexpensive, or even free, intravillage subcontracting and farming on behalf of other farmers. Correspondingly, the planting structure was dominated by traditional farming, which involved planting crops (such as corn and rice); additionally, the agricultural infrastructure was poor, thus resulting in low agricultural efficiency and widespread poverty among farmers. Against this background, the local government has vigorously pursued a rural land consolidation campaign to increase the endogenous development momentum of the countryside and alleviate poverty. Farmers are encouraged to transfer their land to large farmers or agricultural enterprises or to put the land into shares at a price so that land can be concentrated under more productive business entities to achieve a reasonable match between land and other factors of production, thus improving the efficiency of land use and solving the structural contradictions in the allocation of people, land, capital and other factors faced in rural development.

Since the implementation of TPA, the local government has been actively guiding farmers to adjust their planting structure and promoting the standardization and scale development of farming by extensively encouraging the participation of social capital in land consolidation. According to statistics, the ratio of food crops to cash crops planted in the county in 2019 was 30.74:69.26, and the modernized agricultural system supported by the large-scale planting of tea, fruits and Chinese herbs has changed the traditional economic structure of small farmers. The blueberry industry poverty alleviation project and investment by the Kweichow Moutai Group, a leading enterprise in China's liquor industry, can be taken as examples. The group invested 310 million yuan in 2015 to establish a local Moutai ecological agriculture company that was primarily engaged in processing and selling blueberry fruit wine and beverages. By signing a blueberry purchase agreement, the company promised the local government that the company would purchase fresh blueberries at a guaranteed price and provide seedlings and technical assistance for the blueberry planting bases. The local government adopted the BT (build and transfer) model and injected industrial poverty alleviation funds into Danzhai Poverty Alleviation Development Co., Ltd., a state-owned enterprise established by the local government to invest in and finance development-oriented poverty alleviation projects. The Danzhai Poverty Alleviation Development Company then implemented land consolidation to support the blueberry planting base by renting land from poor farmers or helping them establish industrial poverty alleviation cooperatives to concentrate the land to plant blueberries (**Figure 4**). As a result, a blueberry planting base of more than 2000 hectares has been created; this planting base covers 46 villages, while the participating households increased their income by an average of 15 thousand yuan a year through income from land rent, land share dividends, and salaries.

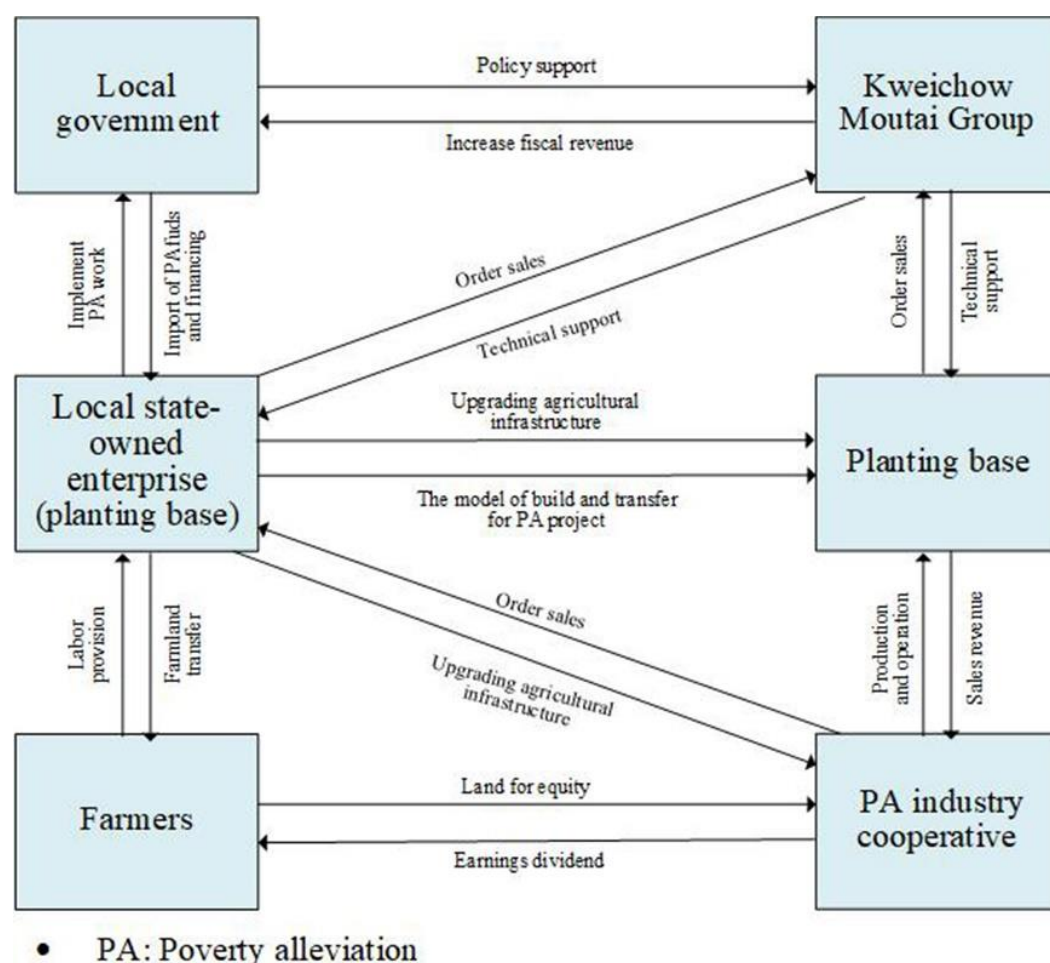


Figure 4. Land consolidation model in the context of poverty alleviation in the blueberry industry.

4.2. Industrial Restructuring Driven by Business-led Industrial Poverty Alleviation

A comprehensive analysis of the ratio and entropy value of Danzhai's industrial structure reveals that the evolution of the industrial structure can be divided into three stages, with 2008 and 2015 being the turning points (**Figure 5**). In the pre-2008 period, the county had a single industrial structure with fewer industrial categories, thus resulting in an increasing entropy value for the industrial structure. The county's economic development during this period was characterized mainly by a high proportion of traditional farming, a weak industrial base, and a service industry that focused mainly on the transportation, communication and public service industries to meet the immediate needs of residents. As a result, there was insufficient synergy between industries, and all industries were small and provided few jobs. According to statistics, 93.33% of the total population in the county was rural in 2000, and 70.66% of rural laborers were employed in the agricultural sector. In 2008, the proportion of the rural population remained at 93.75%, but a decreased number of laborers continued to work in farming. These laborers accounted for 53.47% of the total rural labor force due to offsite industrialization, which led to a massive outflow of rural laborers with periodic employment in other cities. Therefore, the alleviation of poverty through industrial development was not clearly effective during this period, and the socioeconomic life of the county continued to be dominated by traditional farming. During the period from 2008--2015, the value of industrial structure entropy decreased, but this change was caused mainly by the decline in agriculture due to the continually expanding influence of offsite industrialization, and many rural laborers moved

to cities for work, thus leading to a decrease in agricultural production. Additionally, although the service sector represented an increasing proportion of the industrial structure ratio due to the growth of household consumption, such a change did not benefit the rural poor. Consequently, there was still inefficient synergy between industries at this stage, and the internal structure of the county economy continued to be dominated by inefficient traditional industries. In the post-2015 period, the value of industrial structure entropy in the county decreased at an accelerated rate, and the synergy between industries increased. This finding reflects several changes that have taken place in economic development, whereby the tourism-led service industry, which accounted for 56.58% of the county's GDP in 2020, became the county's pillar industry. Through antipoverty-oriented industrial development, Danzhai has gradually transitioned from a traditional agricultural society to a modern society with a well-developed industrial system, and the industrial structure has undergone fundamental changes. These changes are attributed mainly to the Dalian Wanda Group's pro-poor tourism development.

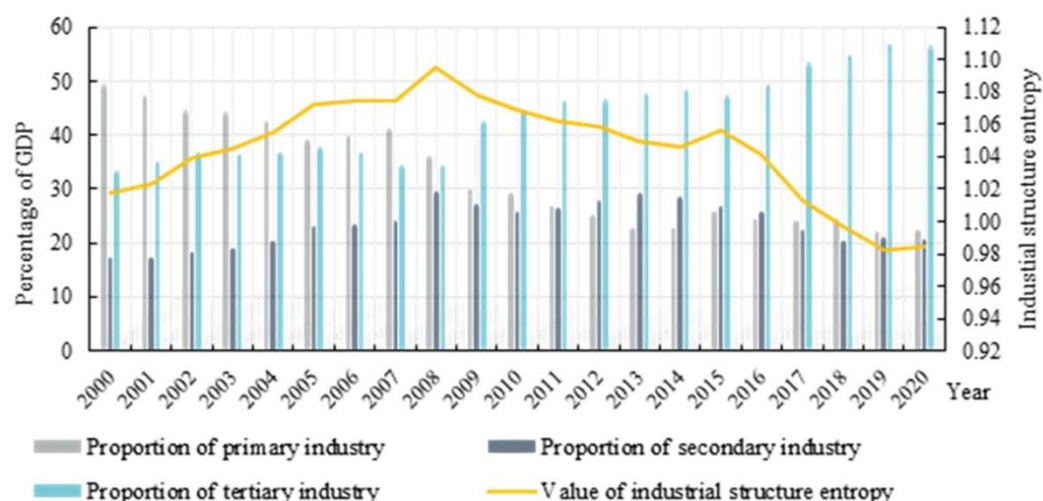


Figure 5. The evolution of the industrial structure in Danzhai County from 2000-2020.

In December 2014, Danzhai obtained a historical development opportunity when the Dalian Wanda Group (DWG), the largest commercial real estate company in China, signed a poverty alleviation agreement with the county government through matchmaking with the Aid-the-Poor Development office of the State Council. Considering the local resource advantages and actual conditions, DWG formulated a poverty alleviation plan that developed the local economy through tourism project development, established industrial funds to subsidize the poor, and invested in education to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Ultimately, 2.3 billion yuan were invested in building the Danzhai Wanda tourist town (DWTT) and Wanda Vocational and Technical College (WVTC) and in establishing the Wanda industrial poverty alleviation fund (WIPAF) to help Danzhai eliminate poverty. To ensure the economic benefits of tourism and poverty reduction in DWTT, DWG selected excellent managers from within the company to operate the town and promised the local government that it would operate the town to maturity before leaving. After DWTT was put into operation, DWG ensured that the town would receive a good response from the tourism market through very creative marketing methods. Among them, the most influential promotion activity was the “rotating mayor” public welfare activity, which attracted the participation of many domestic and foreign entrepreneurs, media representatives, celebrities and other social elites in poverty alleviation in Danzhai. Within the “rotating mayor” activity, a poverty alleviation idea to help tea farmers increase their income was proposed by the thirteenth “rotating mayor”, a tea merchant from Beijing. The DWG put this idea into practice with the support of the local

government and launched a public welfare activity of “claiming the tea garden to help the poor” on the marketing platform of the town. This activity drew upon the idea of developing agrotourism projects in which claimants could receive branded tea produced by tea gardens that the claimants had claimed and vouchers to stay at the Danzhai Wanda Hotel and for traditional cultural experiences. The activity achieved one-on-one assistance between social forces and the poor through the tourist-style claiming method and extended the reach of DWTT in industrial poverty alleviation. According to the statistics, investments involving DWG increase the GDP growth of the county by 1.2% every year. This approach to poverty alleviation pioneered a successful “a company helps a county out of poverty” model in China.

4.3. Farmers' Reorganization Promoted by Stationing Poverty Alleviation Officials

During China's rapid industrialization and urbanization, rural areas in Danzhai are also inevitably experiencing the plight of an aging population and empty villages due to the loss of young and middle-aged laborers. The problem of a left-behind population living in chronic poverty due to the lack of vocational skills thus becomes even more pronounced. As a result, governments at all levels have selected multiple officials to station at each poor village to increase poverty alleviation on a one-to-one basis. As they are specifically responsible for implementing TPA in rural areas, stationing officials are well aware of national poverty alleviation policies and know how to maximize the use of poverty alleviation resources to help poor people. These officials cultivate new business subjects mainly to realize agricultural industrialization and achieve poverty alleviation by helping capable rural residents start their own businesses or develop a collective economy.

Shijia village, one of the poorest villages in the county, can be taken as an example. Two stationing officials from the National Audit Office were assigned to the village between 2016 and 2020. To promote the large-scale development of the white tea industry, stationing officials helped villagers establish an industrial poverty alleviation cooperative and transfer the land centrally to the cooperative to promote the scale planting and unified management of white tea. The stationing officials also strove to establish a special anti-poverty fund for the poor in the village and then turned the fund into shares for the poor in the cooperative to ensure sustainable income generation and poverty reduction. The stationing officials used their own resources and information on poverty alleviation to actively seek low-interest and government-subsidized loans to help the leading tea enterprises in villages expand their business scale. The stationing officials then guided the cooperative to form a benefit linkage mechanism with the tea enterprise by turning land, capital and other elements into shares. This poverty alleviation model links the interests of leading companies, cooperatives and farmers to generate economic profits that ensure that the village rises out of poverty as scheduled. There are approximately 161 industrial poverty alleviation cooperatives, such as Shijia village, in the county, which covers all administrative villages. The development of agricultural industrialization by building a poverty alleviation cooperative to help the poor increase their income has proven to be an effective path applied by stationing officials in poverty alleviation. As a result, the “atomized” farmers were reorganized by industrial poverty alleviation cooperatives, and the original administrative organizational relationship with the village committee at the core gradually gave way to a contractual organizational relationship with the collective economic organization at the core, thus deconstructing the “small farmer” economic system with the family as the basic production unit.

5. Discussion

The case of Danzhai shows that the transformation of the small-scale peasant economy by TPA includes not only the industrialization of agriculture but also the nonagriculturalization of the economy. Poverty alleviation is a complex and systematic project

that requires establishing a poverty governance mechanism with the participation of diverse subjects [44, 45]. Danzhai has realized a transformation of the small-scale peasant economy through the establishment of a mechanism of collaborative governance among the government, businesses and individuals to address poverty. Local governments drive the socioeconomic development of the county through developmental poverty alleviation, and public investment and land projects are used to improve rural production and living conditions by upgrading infrastructure construction and public services in rural areas. However, we should not neglect such efforts' negative effects, such as high debt arising from public investment by local governments and the unfair distribution of benefits from land projects. As the backbone of TPA in Danzhai, businesses have, on the one hand, fostered the tourism industry, established a complete industrial chain for poverty alleviation that radiates out to the poor population, and promoted the transformation of the county's economy away from agriculture. On the other hand, businesses have established a special agricultural industry chain that integrates planting, processing and sales; expands and strengthens agricultural production; breaks away from the traditional production mode of the small peasant economy; promotes the transformation of agricultural production; and modernizes agricultural land utilization. Since the industrial poverty alleviation initiatives implemented by businesses represent public welfare, it is worth considering whether and how local industry can be developed sustainably after these businesses withdraw from poverty alleviation. By fostering leaders in poverty alleviation, developing a village collective economy, and enhancing farmers' organization and community governance, stationed officials have realized the organic combination of state power and villagers' collective action and enhanced the self-development capacity of villages. Nevertheless, the problem of elite capture in the distribution of pro-poor resources should not be underestimated [46, 47]. Obviously, rural restructuring in Danzhai is driven mainly by the joint efforts of the government, businesses and individuals in TPA. Owing to regional differences, the practices in Danzhai may not be fully applicable to other poor areas, but policy makers and other poor areas can fully learn from the TPA experience in Danzhai and establish a collaborative poverty mechanism that fits local conditions to promote rural development.

As a major innovation in the history of human poverty reduction, TPA offers a "Chinese solution" to reduce poverty worldwide [27, 48]. There is no doubt that TPA has profoundly affected rural China, especially in the western part of the country. However, rural restructuring driven by TPA has typical super conventional characteristics. The endogenous impetus of rural development has not yet been fully stimulated, and there are deficiencies, such as a fragile foundation for industrial development, insufficiently stable market connections established solely on the basis of business help, the weak stability of farmers' organizations, and an ongoing reliance on continuous government capital investment for constructing and maintaining infrastructure. After the goal of TPA is achieved, it is still necessary to continuously and comprehensively improve the development level of poor areas to ensure the successful achievement of rural revitalization goals. This study focuses on TPA practices in typical poverty-stricken areas and the impact of these practices. We discuss the impact of TPA on rural areas after the immediate end of the campaign but not the long-term holistic impact. In future studies, the impacts of TPA on rural areas in different regions should be compared, and studies should be conducted on its long-term holistic impact.

6. Conclusion

Since the reform and opening up, China's rural areas have experienced two historic changes, one being the reform of the household responsibility system and the other being the TPA campaign. The implementation of a household responsibility system has once again made the small-scale peasant economy the main economic system in the countryside, thereby solving the problem of overall rural poverty, while the surplus rural labor

released by the system has significantly contributed to sustained economic growth. However, as the modernization process of industrialization and urbanization continues to advance, the gap between regions and between urban and rural areas continues to increase, and rural decay has become common in rural areas. The small-scale peasant economy has been an institutional obstacle to rural modernization and agricultural industrialization and the root cause of structural poverty in rural areas during the first two decades of this century. Relying on this background, the central government proposed the TPA strategy to bridge the shortcomings of rural development, enhance endogenous development momentum in rural areas, and achieve a comprehensive well-off society. Starting by supporting production, developing livelihoods, and improving the human living environment, TPA has established a mechanism of collaborative governance for poverty alleviation; this mechanism is based on the participation of the government and society to ensure that alleviation efforts address regional poverty, household poverty and individual poverty. Led by the TPA, China's rural poverty problem has been effectively solved. Poverty alleviation measures, such as infrastructure and habitat improvement, agricultural land transfer and the development of specialized industries, have promoted the modernization of rural society and the industrialization of agriculture. To some degree, TPA has essentially transformed the traditional small-scale peasant economy.

In the Chinese context, rural restructuring is an important topic because rural development is crucial for urban development and regional economic growth [49]. In contrast to rural restructuring in the developed world, rural restructuring in China is heavily influenced by national macro policies [9, 11]. A TPA campaign with participation throughout society rapidly collected many human and material resources to focus on poor areas over a short period, thereby undoubtedly greatly affecting these areas. In this study, we answered the question of whether and how TPA promoted rural restructuring by analyzing the mechanism and impact of rural restructuring in Danzhai County, according to a framework of collaborative governance to address poverty through government intervention, business investment and individual engagement.

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