

Presentation of Chinese Rural Society in Documentary Films on Rural Revitalization: An Analysis

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Abstract

On January 1, 2011, in order to promote a better global understanding of China, China Central Television's Documentary Channel began broadcasting 24 hours a day worldwide. With the launch of the documentary channel, documentaries officially entered the field of vision of ordinary Chinese citizens, serving as a medium to record the lives of the Chinese populace and presenting their authentic everyday lives and personal stories to the world. This also left behind precious social memories in the rapidly developing China (Wu Haili, 2013). As an agricultural powerhouse, rural areas constitute a significant component of Chinese society, retaining rich historical and cultural traditions. Farmers carry immense spiritual strength and touching narratives, prompting numerous socially responsible documentary filmmakers to turn their cameras towards China's countryside and its people. This effort has led to the creation of a substantial number of outstanding documentary films centered on Chinese rural themes. Chinese rural-themed documentary films have emerged as prime artistic samples reflecting rural societal conditions and transformations. This paper focuses on the rural society portrayed in documentary films with rural themes and analyzes how these films depict various aspects of China's rural society, such as economic production, living environment, education, and employment, within the context of rural revitalization documentaries. Through the analysis and examination of this theme, the paper elucidates the genuine face of China's rural society and its monumental changes depicted in these documentary films, providing a comprehensive perspective and a macroscopic view for the creation of related documentary works (Mao Yurong, 2022).

Keywords: Chinese rural society, rural-themed documentary films, rural revitalization

1. Introduction

This paper employs qualitative analysis, combined with a multitude of rural-themed documentary films, to explore the portrayal of

Chinese rural society within the context of China's rural revitalization era. Employing case analysis and in-depth interviews, this study examines how existing documentary works

illustrate the developmental landscape of various aspects of China's rural society, including living conditions, economics, employment, education, culture, and grassroots governance. When depicting the living environment in Chinese rural areas, this analysis is largely supported by the documentary films *Yin Yang* and *Record of Rural Revitalization in Weizhou*, juxtaposing past and present rural environments to showcase the profound leap in China's rural living conditions. Simultaneously, *Chu Shan Ji* is used to introduce China's policy of relocating impoverished populations to new areas, demonstrating the nation's endeavors to improve the living conditions of its rural inhabitants. To elucidate China's rural economic development, the paper highlights documentary films such as *Pan Jia Wan*, which portrays the village's wealth accumulation through tourism, *Guo Shou Di Luo*, showcasing how the village of Zhong Quan prospered through watermelon cultivation, and *Tao Yuan Village – A Home Deep in Tao Yuan*, depicting the cultivation of Yangshan peaches. The films *Li Tang – City in the Sky*, *Solidarity in Diversity* and *Remembering Homesickness* capture the process of developing unique handicraft industries, revealing three paths to rural prosperity in China: tourism development, agricultural transformation, and distinctive industries. The paper also underscores China's current challenges in rural education, as evident from documentaries like *China's Poverty Alleviation Code*, *Ideal Village*, *Spring in Lei Zi Ba*, and *Faith*. These films underscore the nation's emphasis on rural education development and the unparalleled contributions of Chinese educators in advancing rural education, enabling rural children to access higher levels of education and tirelessly striving for rural education revitalization. When depicting the employment of Chinese rural populations, documentary films such as *New Observations on Poverty Alleviation in China*, *A Farmer, Indeed*, and *With the Arrival of Tourism* attest to how rural residents have transcended traditional subsistence farming, embarking on paths like urban entrepreneurship, returning to their hometowns for specialty crop cultivation, or collectively developing the tourism sector for improved livelihoods. The representation of Chinese rural culture is explored through the story of villager Du Shen Zhong in *China in the Countryside*, highlighting the shift from the former extravagance of rural culture to the

contemporary emphasis on national rural culture. Additionally, *Love Letters on the Land* presents shadow puppetry stories to depict the inheritance and promotion of rural folklore. Films like *Chinese Villages* and *Remembering Homesickness* interpret and exhibit the spiritual and cultural essence of villages, underlining the pursuit and preservation of rural culture. The paper further delves into Chinese rural grassroots governance, utilizing conflicts between village head Zhang Zi En and villager Zhang Guang Di in *China in the Countryside* to illustrate the pressures and challenges faced by grassroots village officials. Characters such as Shen Xiu Jun in *Chu Shan Ji*, Yu Zong Yang in *With the Arrival of Tourism*, and Pan Dao Sheng in *Pan Jia Wan* exemplify the leadership of grassroots officials in driving rural development and wealth accumulation despite immense pressure. The documentary *Record of Rural Revitalization in Weizhou* displays reform in rural organizational structures, highlighting significant advancements in China's rural grassroots governance. Through the analysis of relevant documentary films, this paper summarizes the diverse representation of Chinese rural society across various aspects within the context of the rural revitalization era. By offering new perspectives and inspiration to documentary creators, the paper aims to stimulate the production of rural-themed documentaries and foster a deeper understanding of the authentic China among audiences (Mao Yurong, 2022).

2. Background

In the sixth year of the comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization in 2023, significant achievements have been made in rural construction. Rural industries have experienced vigorous development, leading to a substantial increase in farmers' income and a steady improvement in their living standards. The results of poverty alleviation efforts have expanded, and the rural revitalization strategy is still in progress. (Zheng Chengming, 2022)

In terms of living environment, rural infrastructure such as roads, housing, internet, water, and electricity facilities have been improved. The national sanitation coverage rate of toilets has exceeded 70%, providing rural areas with basic modern living conditions. In the aspect of industrial revitalization, the central finance department of China allocated a rural revitalization subsidy fund of up to 175 billion

yuan in 2023, with over 60% of the funds dedicated to industrial development. In rural education in China, there are still issues of uneven teacher workforce construction and expenditure, but significant progress has been made in various indicators of preschool education, compulsory education, and rural education, especially the rapid development of preschool education.

Concerning rural cultural revitalization, driven by party and state policies, villagers' lives have become rich and colorful, and the coverage rate of comprehensive cultural service centers at the village level has reached 96%. The core socialist values are deeply practiced, and outstanding Chinese traditional culture is inherited and promoted. A total of 6,819 Chinese traditional villages have been recognized, effectively boosting the morale and spirit of farmers. In China's rural governance system, the role of rural grassroots party organizations as strongholds has been further strengthened, and a modern rural social governance system led by party committees, government responsibility, social coordination, public participation, and legal safeguards has gradually been established and improved. (Du Qiong, 2022)

Since the introduction of the rural revitalization strategy, rural China has provided abundant real-life materials for documentary filmmaking, offering valuable artistic inspiration to documentary directors. Documentaries possess the characteristics of reality and art, making them the best examples of living and expressive real-life narratives. As a result, documentaries have the potential to vividly portray the tremendous changes in rural areas under the backdrop of the rural revitalization strategy. (Zhu Zhongjun, 2021)

Starting from 2005, a large number of films and TV works with rural themes emerged in China. After the proposal of the rural revitalization strategy in 2017, there has been a constant stream of excellent documentary works centered on rural revitalization. The documentaries mentioned in this paper, such as *China in the Countryside*, *Within the Village*, *Ripe Fruit and Falling Leaves*, *Remembering Hometown Nostalgia*, and *China's Poverty Reduction Code*, are outstanding documentary works with both theoretical and artistic value. The subsequent sections of this paper will analyze the representation of Chinese rural society in many excellent documentary works.

3. Problem Statement

This article aims to provide new perspectives for other documentary directors by analyzing existing rural revitalization documentaries and engaging in in-depth discussions with directors who focus on rural themes. It intends to offer fresh ideas and pathways for innovation in documentary practice and theory. Moreover, rural issues are fundamental concerns in China, intertwined with the nation's economy and citizens' livelihoods. Documentaries centered on rural revitalization serve as potent tools for recording epochal transformations, driving rural development, and enhancing the dissemination of rural culture. The purpose of this article is to present the real portrayal of rural China through documentaries — depicting the current status of rural environment, economy, education, employment, and grassroots organizations. It seeks to illuminate the contrast between past and present rural China, showcasing the achievements of the rural revitalization strategy. This effort aims to make the world understand China's ongoing growth, pay attention to rural reform trends and issues, and amplify Chinese people's awareness of the nation's rapid development and increasing strength, thus bolstering national self-confidence. (Wu Xinyue, 2021)

The article also analyzes and presents the existing problems and challenges in the depiction of Chinese rural society within documentaries. By highlighting the "pain points" of rural issues, it stimulates relevant contemplation among viewers, documenting the historical progress of rural development and contributing to positive impact. (Sun Wenxiu, 2020) The article narrates rural stories using real documentary cases to depict rural transformations, continuously supporting rural revitalization, and aiding better documentary creation to meet the audiences' needs.

Whether viewed from the perspective of rural development in China or the development of documentaries, studying rural revitalization documentary creation is of paramount importance. Investigating rural revitalization-themed documentaries can better guide documentary directors' creative efforts, resulting in exquisite audiovisual works depicting rural revitalization. Furthermore, this research enriches the theoretical framework of rural revitalization documentaries, making them more scientific, comprehensive, diversified, and

innovative. In the future, research on rural revitalization documentaries will continue to improve, driving outstanding progress in both quality and quantity of works centered on rural themes.

4. Research Methods

This article centers around the presentation of rural society in rural revitalization-themed documentaries. It focuses on six aspects of Chinese rural life: living environment, economic development, education, employment, cultural revitalization, and grassroots management. (Sun Xiaoqing, 2020) The article employs three main research methods:

Literature Analysis Method: This method involves the careful study of works such as *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* by Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong and *China in Liangzhuang* by Liang Hong, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of Literature. It also involves searching keywords like "rural revitalization" and "rural society" on platforms like CNKI, VIP, and Wanfang Data to categorize, analyze, and summarize existing research, forming a foundation for this study.

Case Study Method: This method involves observing exemplary rural-themed documentaries, analyzing, organizing, interpreting, and explaining their content. It focuses on individual cases within documentaries, using instances like the misunderstanding between Zhang Zhen, the village head of "China in the Countryside," and other villagers to illustrate the challenges faced by grassroots leadership in rural China. Using the documentary *Chu Shan Ji* as an example, it explores China's poverty alleviation and relocation strategy, using individual cases to provide objective and systematic analysis.

In-depth Interview Method: This method involves conducting interviews with grassroots workers and conducting surveys among local residents to understand real perspectives and situations in the context of rural revitalization. Engaging in in-depth conversations with accomplished documentary directors helps elucidate the profound social meanings behind their works.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The rural revitalization strategy was launched on October 18, 2017. Prior to its implementation, many remote rural areas in China faced poor

living conditions. Farmers primarily relied on cultivating single crops for sustenance, and their income predominantly stemmed from traditional agriculture and craftsmanship. Rural areas lacked adequate medical and educational resources, and issues related to elderly care were pressing. However, in the years following the initiation of poverty alleviation and rural revitalization strategies, rural China underwent transformative changes. Yet, some individuals with limited understanding of Chinese society still held stereotypes about rural China, envisioning it as isolated, backward, conservative, and environmentally deteriorated. They had an impression of Chinese farmers as unkind, uncivilized, dirty, and poorly educated. These perceptions ignored China's rapid rural development, increasing material living standards, the remarkable achievements of poverty alleviation and rural revitalization strategies, and China's growth as a nation. (Xu Ruiyang, 2020) In response to such perspectives, socially responsible filmmakers began focusing on Chinese rural life, using cameras to reveal the authentic environments and experiences of Chinese rural areas. This showcased the world the true face of rural China: a collection of beautiful villages with comfortable environments, economic development, and harmonious culture, replacing the image of poverty and backwardness.

6. Rural Revitalization-Themed Documentaries: Reflecting the Facets of Rural China

Zhang Tongdao, the director of the Documentary Center at Beijing Normal University, stated, "Documentaries are records of times undergoing significant change. They are not just external observations and portrayals but also a driving force for societal transformation. To some extent, they are faithful to the era and powerful agents of change." (Du Qiong, 2022) With the implementation of policies like poverty alleviation and rural revitalization, numerous farmers have realized the long-awaited improvements in their lives. Accomplished Chinese rural-themed documentaries have been continuously created, reflecting the immense transformations in rural society. Talented documentary directors portray the vast changes in Chinese rural society through aspects such as living environments, economic industries, employment, healthcare, and education, showcasing the genuine rural environment.

Section One: Environment — From

Backwardness to Openness Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong, in his work *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, stated, “In traditional Chinese villages, regardless of size, they are relatively isolated and separated.” (Fei Xiaotong, 2011) Due to the traditional rural structure and small-scale agricultural economic models in Chinese rural society, farmers’ livelihoods were dependent on the fixed land within their villages. The connections between villages were limited, leading to the backwardness and isolation of some mountainous or remote rural areas. The mindset of the farmers in such areas was also relatively conservative.

6.1 Previous Infertile Land

As early as 1997, before the implementation of rural revitalization and poverty alleviation strategies in China, the documentary series *Yin Yang*, directed by Kang Jianing, depicted the real-life living environment of rural Chinese people. The series focused on Xu Wenzhang, a diviner and fortune teller for the villagers in the ancient countryside. The documentary portrayed Xu Wenzhang’s efforts to find water sources and construct water wells in the arid and rain-starved Dawopu Village, Pengyang County, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. The village suffered from a lack of water sources, leading to food scarcity and harsh living conditions. Despite Xu’s attempts, the construction of a water reservoir was hindered by selfish motives among the villagers. In this challenging and closed environment, the water sources and land were infertile, reflecting the impoverished state of living.

6.2 Poverty Alleviation and Relocation

Documentaries serve as mirrors of the times, witnessing the direction of change, transformations in appearances, origins of dreams, various joys and sorrows, our collective history, and China’s daily progress. (Wei Song, 2014) After the introduction of the rural revitalization strategy, many ecologically challenged and underdeveloped villages like Dawopu began relocating to areas with better production conditions under the unified organization of the Chinese government and voluntary participation of farmers. The documentary *Chu Shan Ji* directed by Jiao Bo narrates the story of the relocation of the entire population of Daqi Village in Shizhao Township, Zunyi City, Guizhou Province. Daqi Village,

situated on the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau in Southwest China, was characterized by difficult terrain, complex transportation, isolated and backward living conditions, and extreme poverty. After thorough research by poverty alleviation officials, a comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy was initiated, focusing on relocation, infrastructure construction, and development of characteristic industries. The film concludes with the villagers moving into modern urban communities with improved living conditions and infrastructures, marking the end of the days of deprivation and hardship. The village head, Shen XiuJun, who faced various misunderstandings and criticisms, finally smiled warmly upon seeing the comfortable and convenient high-rise buildings where his fellow villagers now lived.

6.3 Everywhere in China is a “Peach Blossom Spring”

During the filming process of the documentary *Rural Revitalization Weifang Chronicles* in the first half of 2022, villages like Yangjiabu, Jiulongyu, Chijian, and Sananzi in Weifang, Shandong Province, exhibited neat houses and clean roads. The villages were adorned with white walls, blue tiles, pink bricks, and colorful decorations, reminiscent of the idyllic imagery of the “Peach Blossom Spring” from ancient Chinese literature. Weifang’s villages epitomize the broader rural landscape in China. With the advancement of the rural revitalization strategy, policies such as dilapidated house reconstruction, poverty alleviation relocation, rural toilet improvement, and rural natural gas subsidies have substantially improved farmers’ living conditions. The era of closed, impoverished, and backward rural environments is no more.

7. Economy — From Poverty to Prosperity

In the “Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022)” issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council in September 2018, it was emphasized that the transformation and upgrading of agriculture required the development of distinctive advantageous industries. It stated, “Based on local resource endowments and unique historical and cultural factors, orderly develop advantageous characteristic resources and make these industries bigger and stronger.” (Feng Wenli & Su Xiaopeng, 2019) Thriving industries are driving changes in rural economies, and many documentaries focus on

rural industries, offering profound insights into the reasons for villagers' prosperity and the direction of rural development. Contemporary French thinker Henri Lefebvre pointed out that the evolution of the concept of space in historical processes goes from "production within space" to "production of space." (Lefebvre, 2012)

7.1 The Path of Tourism Development

The documentary *Pan's Family* directed by Zhang Mimmi centers around the work of Pan Daosheng, the village head of Panjiawan Village in Baimiaohe Town, Luotian County, Huanggang City, Hubei Province. It narrates the story of poverty alleviation through industry and tourism development. Panjiawan Village shed its impoverished image through tourism development, transitioning from traditional terraced farming to tourism. This village, nestled in high-altitude mountainous areas, serves as a microcosm of rural poverty alleviation and prosperity. The development of tourism has transformed Panjiawan Village into a destination with established attractions and promotional strategies. Tourists from all over the country flock to admire the unique E'dong architectural style, the Yang Family Ancestral Hall, the Thousand-Foot Waterfall, the complete ancient city walls of Zhubuzhai, including forts and trenches, and the vast terraced fields and swaying bamboo forests. The village receives over 10,000 visitors annually, contributing substantial income to the village.

7.2 The Path of Agricultural Transformation

The documentary *Ripe Melons, Falling Gourds* follows the lives of three watermelon farmers in Zhongquan Village, Pucheng County, Shaanxi Province, over the course of a year, depicting the journey from planting to harvesting. The film captures the hardships, challenges, and emotions of the farmers, reflecting the real-life struggles and profound changes in rural China. With centuries-old traditions of watermelon cultivation, Zhongquan Village's economy remains heavily reliant on greenhouse cultivation. Under the backdrop of rural revitalization, the village has transformed its traditional agricultural practices. By prioritizing local environmental governance and efficient industrial management, the yield and quality of watermelons have improved. With increased market access, Zhongquan Village's reputation for high-quality watermelons has grown, leading to higher incomes for farmers.

7.3 The Path of Distinctive Industries

In the eighth season of the documentary *Remembering Hometown*, the episode "Litang — City in the Sky, United in Boat" showcases the development of tourism in Litang Town, attracting numerous migrant workers to return home and start businesses. People engage in various ventures such as catering, homestays, specialty hotels, and e-commerce. For instance, the documentary highlights Zaxi Quzhong, who uses online platforms to sell "Nire," a locally hand-woven woolen blanket. This small business reflects the resilience and vitality of Litang's entrepreneurial spirit. Similarly, the episode "Yangjiabu — A New Model of Revitalization" from the documentary series *Rural Revitalization Weifang Chronicles* portrays Yangjiabu Village in Shandong's Hanting District. The episode analyzes the village's success in rural revitalization through "specialized agriculture," "folk handicrafts," and "cultural tourism." These factors have driven the village's economic growth, benefiting local residents and promoting local culture. In *Fields of Hope: Riverside of the La Lin River*, directed by Shen Shu, the documentary tells the story of how ordinary farmers in Dujia Town, Wuchang City, Heilongjiang Province, leveraged the internet to expand the market for their local rice. This initiative resulted in the creation of the renowned "Wuchang Rice, the Best Rice in China." The documentary captures the journey from local production to national recognition, demonstrating the power of internet-enabled rural entrepreneurship.

8. Education — From Scarcity to Development

Chinese poet Bai Juyi wrote in his *Three Miscellaneous Songs* that "Anciently called a treasure of the nation, grain and talent." This reflects China's historical emphasis on both agriculture and education. As a populous nation, strong agriculture forms the foundation of national strength, while talent serves as the primary resource for national development. Sound education is essential for nurturing outstanding individuals who contribute to the country's progress.

8.1 National Education Subsidies

In the documentary *China's Poverty Reduction Code* produced by Xinhua News Agency, the Daliangshan region in Sichuan, China, is a remote and underdeveloped area on the southeastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

The local Yi ethnic village in Liangshan Prefecture was one of the last regions in China to abolish slavery, resulting in limited access to education for many residents. Jin Xin, a Yi teenager, is supported by his mother Jiekeyiwumo, who was denied an education in her youth due to historical circumstances. The Lu Gouqiao Middle School that Jin Xin attends is part of a state-sponsored poverty alleviation initiative. The school not only provides free tuition but also offers a yearly subsidy of 1000 yuan, alleviating financial burdens on his family. The school's emphasis on holistic development and extracurricular activities, such as boxing, allowed Jin Xin to secure a spot in the provincial boxing team, changing his fate and broadening his future prospects. In the documentary *The Ideal Village*, Gao Runmei, a nurturing teacher at the Huangjin Village Foster Care Center, is featured. In rural areas, where many men work away from home, childcare responsibilities often fall on women. In recent years, China has focused on early childhood education in rural areas by establishing roles for village nurturing teachers. These teachers guide rural women in nurturing infants and toddlers, providing them with early education similar to that available in urban areas.

8.2 Contributions of Excellent Educational Researchers to Educational Revival

In the documentary *In the Village*, specifically in the episode "Spring in Dianzi Ba," the Dianzi Ba Primary School has flourished under the dedicated efforts of educational consultant Zhao Hongzhi. Zhao, formerly the director of the Rural Education Center at the National Institute of Education Research, has devoted over a decade to China's rural education cause. When Zhao first arrived at Dianzi Ba, the school faced challenges such as inadequate teaching conditions and a shortage of qualified teachers due to its remote location. Additionally, students had to travel an average of three hours to reach school, and lunch was a problem due to limited resources. With Zhao's perseverance and dedication, the school was renovated, and essential facilities like the playful game room, communal dining hall, and shared showers were established. Through effective communication with parents of at-risk students, Zhao emphasized the importance of parental involvement and reading, significantly reducing the dropout rate and enhancing both student and teacher numbers. In the micro-documentary

Belief, the principal Zhang Guimei of the Huaping Girls' High School in Yunnan Province is featured. For over 40 years, Zhang Guimei has championed the belief that "educating a girl is equivalent to uplifting three generations of her family." During her 15-year tenure as the school's principal, she utilized her salary, government subsidies, and donations to assist impoverished girls in attending school. Over 2,000 disadvantaged female students have been able to access higher education due to her efforts, transforming their lives and those of their families. Despite personal hardships, including the loss of her husband, Zhang Guimei devoted her entire life to China's rural education and poverty alleviation.

9. Employment — From Monotony to Diversity

As the rural revitalization strategy takes root, it has shattered many existing rural industrial structures. Many farmers are no longer limited to traditional agriculture for income, breaking free from the monotonous life of facing the earth and seeking diverse occupations that fulfill their family needs and personal value in the changing times.

9.1 Urban Entrepreneurship

Rachel Murphy's empirical research on rural migrant workers in southern China suggests that rural-to-urban migration has had a significant impact on rural areas and the broader Chinese society, reshaping rural China. In the documentary *A New Perspective on Poverty Alleviation in China*, Ma Esa, from Maogou Village in Dongxiang County, Gansu Province, ventured to the city to start his own restaurant business and became a successful entrepreneur. After more than a decade of hard work, his hand-pulled lamb noodle soup has become a renowned local brand. Over the years, he has opened more than ten chain restaurants. His success not only provides him substantial income but also creates employment opportunities for many villagers in his hometown.

9.2 Rural Return and Development

Entrepreneurship isn't limited to leaving one's hometown; it can also involve seeking paths to prosperity within the local community. In the third episode "Being a Farmer" of the rural documentary series *In the Village*, Yao Huifeng, a college graduate, returned to his hometown in Yifeng County, Jiangxi Province, after completing his education. While many children

from remote rural areas aspire to leave their villages for urban opportunities, Yao Huifeng chose a different path. He started cultivating rice using innovative techniques that eschewed pesticides and chemical fertilizers, creating “ecological rice.” He established a cooperative, collection points, and welcomed students from agricultural schools to visit his rice fields. Yao Huifeng’s efforts have led to strong sales of ecological rice in recent years, expanding his horizons for the future.

9.3 Collective Prosperity

In the fourth episode “Tourism Arrives” of the documentary series *In the Village*, the Pai Zha Miao Village in Taijiang County, Guizhou Province, was once a poverty-stricken area. Its villagers relied on farming and pig farming, with meager incomes. Many young people sought work in cities to support their families. In 2011, the Central Organization Department initiated targeted assistance in Taijiang Province, implementing various measures. In 2016, resident secretaries were dispatched to work in Pai Zha Village. One of these resident secretaries was Yu Zongyang, a master’s graduate from Tsinghua University Law School, who chose to contribute to China’s rural development where it was most needed. By staying with local villagers and living with them, Yu Zongyang gained genuine insights into their lives. After thorough visits and discussions with villagers, he identified breakthroughs and strategies for poverty alleviation — from the “toilet revolution” to rural tourism. Yu Zongyang guided villagers in constructing modern and hygienic restrooms. He combined dispersed pig pens into a pig farming facility. In cooperation with the “Green Cross” village construction team from Beijing, he transformed traditional homes into guesthouses with residential spaces upstairs and hospitality areas downstairs, known as “Sun Jun Yard.” Leveraging the ethnic culture of the Miao people, Yu Zongyang promoted tourism and collective economic development. He utilized the internet for promotion and efficiently organized villagers’ tasks. Villager Wang Dezhi, through cooperative efforts, started the largest restaurant in the village, “Wangyuelou,” which now serves over 200 customers monthly, generating more income in one month than he used to make in a year. Many young villagers who had previously worked elsewhere also returned, forming dance troupes to perform for tourists. Skilled women

like Miao embroidery inheritor Zhang Yanmei established embroidery workshops, resulting in a steady stream of orders. The villagers of Pai Zha Miao Village have overcome poverty and now lead fulfilling lives, realizing their true life value within their orderly and comfortable guesthouses, vibrant songs and dances, and the joy of shared responsibilities.

10. Culture: From Desiccation to Vibrancy

Taylor, E. (1992), in his work *Primitive Culture*, defines culture as: “Culture or civilization, in its broadest ethnological sense, is a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by a member of society.” Villages are an important component of Chinese society, preserving the rich cultural traditions of Chinese history. The culture of Chinese villages has also been revitalized with the development of the times.

Section One: From Neglecting Rural Culture to Reviving Rural Culture.

Dong Li, Li Qing’an & Lin Chongde (2014) argue that the rural cultural environment is an inherent structure present from birth, influencing individuals’ thoughts, values, aesthetics, and overall conceptual systems. Individuals growing up in the same cultural environment are more likely to develop mutual recognition. In the documentary *China in the Village* directed by Jiao Bo in 2014, Du Shenzhong stands out as an “outsider” within his village. The villagers lead unchanging lives around apple trees, following the routine of seasons — fertilizing in spring, pollinating in summer, harvesting in autumn — and their daily routines. This lifestyle leads the villagers to overlook cultural awareness and diminish their exploration of imagination. However, Du Shenzhong maintains reverence for culture and pursues spiritual enrichment. Du Shenzhong loves literature, studies poetry, practices calligraphy, and enjoys music. Bathed in sunlight on the cement floor in front of his house, he dips his brush in water and practices calligraphy, saying, “Light and shadow are the most beautiful paper.” Du Shenzhong remains highly attuned to beauty. He even spent half a year’s income to buy a pipa, a traditional Chinese musical instrument, and told his wife Zhang Zhaozhen, “The spirit also needs sustenance, it needs nurturing.” Du Shenzhong’s life is tragic in that the space he once lived in

and his spiritual space are at odds. However, he is also fortunate because the revitalization of rural culture is a crucial part of the rural revitalization strategy, which provides clear planning for the prosperity of rural culture. Promoting cultural revitalization involves employing various methods, adapting to local conditions, enriching rural cultural life, promoting urban-rural cultural exchanges, and further providing good cultural resources and platforms for the spiritual and cultural needs of farmers. In the final scenes of the documentary *China in the Village*, a cultural square is successfully constructed in the village. Du Shenzhong accompanies his wife in singing, playing the pipa, thus achieving reconciliation with her and with the village.

Section Two: Inheritance and Promotion of Rural Folk Culture.

Folk culture is a treasure of Chinese civilization and a mirror reflecting the dynamic culture of villages. It contains local excellent ideas, humanistic spirit, artistic connotations, and is a wellspring that nurtures the human spirit. In the documentary *Love Letters from the Land*, the living conditions and attitudes of farmers in northeastern China are comprehensively displayed, with an especially exquisite representation of folk culture. Shadow puppetry is a form of entertainment for farmers in the northeastern regions, with a history of hundreds of years. Within the shadow puppets are carried ordinary and honorable character stories, constituting a precious craftsmanship. In the documentary, Gu Aizhen of Tangyue Village in Hefei, Anhui Province is an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage related to archways. She hopes her daughter Guan Haiying will carry on the legacy and promote shadow puppetry, but due to economic concerns, her daughter hesitates. However, faced with historical responsibility, Guan Haiying undertakes the duty and shoulders the responsibility of inheriting folk culture. Through her efforts, Guan Haiying brings shadow puppetry into schools, aiming to ignite young people's interest in shadow puppetry through performances, enabling them to grasp the immense charm of Chinese folk culture and ensuring the transmission of this art.

In the documentary *Revitalizing Rural Weifang*, produced under my guidance, the village of Yang Jiabu in Hanting District, Weifang City, Shandong Province is showcased. This village

vigorously promotes Chinese intangible cultural heritage. By establishing the Yang Jiabu Daguan Yuan Tourism Development Zone, setting up the Weifang Kite Museum, Yang Jiabu Yangjiabu Nianhua Museum, and utilizing platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok to publicize intangible culture, it has set a positive example for the cultural construction of other Chinese villages.

Section Three: Unearthing Local Culture.

Rural local culture is the embodiment of various regions' spirits, conveying unique national characteristics and spirits within rural civilization. In the third episode "Family Heritage" of the documentary series *Chinese Villages*, distinct local cultures are demonstrated through introducing historical stories from different villages. The archway culture of Tangyue Village in Shexian County, Anhui Province reflects the generations of loyalty and righteousness upheld by its villagers. The family contract culture of the Que clan in Songyang, Zhejiang Province conveys the Que family's commitment to keeping their word. The ancient courtyard homes in Pingyao, Shanxi Province carry the profound wisdom of Pingyao's businesspeople. Rural documentaries play a powerful role in propagating local culture, enhancing the mission of people's cultural responsibility. In "Remembering Hometown Nostalgia," the documentary *Litang – City in the Sky, Mutual Support in the Same Boat*, traces cultural stories to present the core spirit of "mutual support in the same boat" and the rich ethnic culture of Litang. In "Remembering Hometown Nostalgia," the documentary *Fuan – Bold Assumption in an Ancient Eastern City* employs the traditional Chinese performing art of "Fuan Pinghua" to recount the Chen family's story of sacrifice and heroism in defending the city, illustrating the spirit and courage of the people of Fuan.

Huntington, S. P (2000) believes that culture encompasses a society's values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and generally held views, exerting a significant impact on social, political, and economic behavior.

11. Grassroots Management: From Passivity to Efficiency

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, rural governance has been ongoing for over seventy years. During this period, China has encountered numerous challenges and

setbacks but has ultimately forged a path of rural governance with Chinese characteristics that suits its national conditions. Recent documentary works also illustrate the changes in grassroots management within Chinese villages.

Section One: Former Passivity and Challenges

In the past, Chinese rural areas faced numerous management issues due to historical legacies and outdated ideologies. Problems included weak grassroots organizational capacity, low cohesion, fragmented management teams, and low project implementation rates. In the documentary *China in the Village* directed by Jiao Bo, the character Zhang Zien, a village head, vividly portrays the challenges of rural work. When constructing a public cultural square in the village, opposition from villager Zhang Guangdi arose due to the need to cut down his tree. In Chinese rural customs, trees belong to the planter as private property, offering not only economic value but also building materials. After his tree was cut down, Zhang Guangdi not only verbally confronted Zhang Zien but also physically attacked him with an iron hoe. Zhang Guangdi failed to grasp the concept of benefiting the village and rejected Zhang Zien's explanations, channeling all his discontent towards the village head. This directly hindered the progress of the village's cultural projects. Following this conflict, Zhang Zien was reported by Zhang Guangdi for alleged corruption, leading to repeated financial audits and hindering Zhang Zien's work progress. While striving for development in the village, Zhang Zien faced much frustration and confusion. Despite this, he remained dedicated to the village's service. Zhang Zien's experience reflects the challenges faced by many grassroots managers in China's history. Zhang Zien's efforts were noble but solitary, symbolizing a lone traveler slowly moving forward with the village like a backpacker.

Section Two: Achievements of Poverty Alleviation by Grassroots Cadres

In *China in the Village*, village head Zhang Zien shoulders immense hardship but actively manages conflicts among villagers, dedicating himself to the village's development. Many other grassroots cadres in rural revitalization documentaries exhibit similar dedication, achieving significant results through poverty alleviation policies. In the documentary *Coming*

Down from the Mountains, village head Shen Xiu Jun, in an extremely impoverished village, remains unwavering in the face of adversity. He led the villagers in establishing unique industries, overcoming resistance towards relocation, and dispelling misconceptions, ultimately lifting the village out of poverty. The system of "residing in villages," evolved from the "work team" of the early Liberation period, has become an essential tool relied upon by various levels of government. During this period, grassroots cadres mainly focused on reconstructing relationships between officials and the public, conducting land reforms (Liu Jinhai, 2012). This system has gradually become a distinctive work institution within China's rural governance, embodying the institutionalized operational mechanism of the Chinese Communist Party's "mass line" and "closely connecting with the masses" (Ouyang Jing, 2012). These cadres are instrumental in promoting rural development and implementing poverty alleviation measures.

Section Three: Revitalization of Rural Organizations

As part of the rural revitalization strategy, organizational revitalization is also an important strategic aspect. Today's grassroots leadership teams in Chinese villages are no longer led solely by village heads, but rather by village heads and party members working together for development. In the documentary *Revitalization Chronicle of Sananzi Village*, village party members commit to and fulfill promises, working together as a village committee to advance rural revitalization. By establishing service-oriented party organizations, they inspire party members' responsibility and motivation, setting an example for villagers. The village vigorously implements the "Four Deliberations, Two Publicities, and One Supervision" working method, ensuring transparency in public affairs through pre-deliberation, mid-supervision, and post-audit procedures. To date, 200 major matters concerning the people's interests have undergone democratic decision-making, allowing villagers to participate actively in rural development. This approach has achieved a satisfaction rate of 100% in terms of work progress and results. Documentary films are considered to be "concrete raw materials of the real material world and life experiences" (Bill Nichols & Wang Chi, 2021). In an interview with

renowned rural documentary filmmaker and former Art Director of the State Council Information Office Photo Archive, Jiao Bo, he mentioned, "China's rural areas are undergoing rapid changes. After implementing the poverty alleviation and rural revitalization strategies, backward villages no longer exist. The villages that the elderly remember no longer exist. They may miss that sense of nostalgia. Many young people have never experienced rural life and might be curious about it. Therefore, rural themes are scarce in documentaries. We are recording the changing face of developing rural areas, showing the process of change." Documentary films can capture this real process. Due to the powerful social function of documenting reality, China's rural social changes are captured through documentary films, projected onto screens. Chinese rural documentary filmmakers turn their cameras toward the oldest land and the most down-to-earth farmers, enabling the world to witness the remarkable achievements of China's rural revitalization and poverty alleviation strategies. Today, Chinese rural-themed documentaries have become the best artistic examples reflecting the conditions and changes of rural areas. In academia, many scholars in the film and television industry have begun to explore rural-themed documentaries, leading to more in-depth and comprehensive research on this subject. Documentaries serve as memory albums for China's rural areas, granting them greater value and vitality.

12. Conclusion

The rural revitalization strategy, centered around the concise guideline of "prosperous industries, livable ecology, civilized rural culture, effective governance, and prosperous lives," has embarked on a monumental journey across the vast expanse of China. Chinese rural areas have experienced remarkable and outstanding developments in various aspects such as production, living conditions, education, and culture. The qualities and education levels of farmers have significantly improved, leading to a more liberated, comfortable, harmonious, and beautiful rural life.

Chinese villages are the cradle of China's millennia-old cultural history and the roots of its 1.4 billion people. The Chinese people are born, nurtured, and contribute back to these villages. Under the rural revitalization strategy, Chinese villages have rejuvenated with new vitality. In

this fertile artistic ground, numerous documentary directors continue their great yet humble endeavors, allowing the world to understand the ever-changing new rural landscape and the vibrant development of the new China. By analyzing existing rural revitalization documentaries, new ideas and paths are provided for documentary creation, enriching the theoretical framework of rural revitalization documentaries, making them more scientifically comprehensive, and embracing diverse innovative development.

The research on rural revitalization documentaries will continue to refine, better guiding documentary directors' creative efforts, and delivering more exquisite documentary works to the public.

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