

Review

# The Triple Logic and Choice Strategy of Rural Revitalization in the 70 Years since the Founding of the People's Republic of China, Based on the Perspective of Historical Evolution

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**Abstract:** Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has continuously improved and developed the rural system, deepened rural reform, and promoted the process of agricultural and rural modernization. This paper constructs an analytical framework of rural revitalization and explores the logical law behind it from the three aspects of theoretical evolution, historical evolution, and realistic development. Then, on the basis of summarizing the existing rural revitalization path model, in view of the lack of industrial, ecological, cultural, and other rural revitalization path development models, the paper explores the general principles of rural revitalization path selection and puts forward a realistic choice: First, the key breakthrough of rural revitalization will be achieved through the construction of a rural revitalization planning system, land system reform, and green development. Second, the connotation and extension of concepts, such as “small farmers”, “industry prosperity”, and “rural areas”, are objectively analyzed and evaluated, so as to promote rural revitalization and avoid the risks and challenges that it may face in practice.

**Keywords:** rural; revitalization; triple logic; path choice; historical evolution

## 1. Introduction

The issue of “three rural” (i.e., the issue of “three rural” refers to the problems of the continuous modernization of Chinese cities, the continuous development of secondary and tertiary industries, and the continuous improvement of urban residents, while the progress of rural areas, the development of agriculture, and the well-being of farmers are relatively lagging behind) has always been a top priority of the work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the state. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central Committee has continuously developed and perfected the policy choice and target orientation of rural areas in accordance with the changes of the rural economy and society. From land reform and cooperation in the early period of the founding of the People's Republic to the development of the rural economy and the implementation of the strategy of rural revitalization since the reform and opening-up, the path of rural development has become increasingly clear. According to statistics, the total agricultural output value in 2018 (647.3 billion yuan) (the date comes from the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin) was 238.2 times that of the early days of the founding (27.18 billion yuan), and the Engel coefficient of rural residents fell from more than 70% at that time to 30.1% (the date comes from the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin) in 2018, which is within the 20–30% abundance

standard as determined by the United Nations. The per capita net income of rural residents increased from 44 yuan in 1949 to 14,617 yuan (the date comes from the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin) in 2018, an increase of 331.2 times [1]. In this context, the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forward the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy to solve the new situation and problems in the three rural areas, especially the imbalance between urban and rural development and inadequate rural development. Only in this way can we better safeguard the fruitful results of 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China and begin a new journey of rural revitalization.

Since the strategy of rural revitalization was proposed by the 19th National Congress, research on rural revitalization has sprung up, including the following aspects: First, research attempting to explain the connotation of rural revitalization has been conducted. Li [2] and Ye [3] believe that "industry prosperity, ecological livability, rural civilization, effective governance, rich life" are a vivid embodiment of the connotation of rural revitalization, which is richer and has clearer goals than the new socialist countryside "20-word policy" (production and development, well-off life, rural civilization, clean village appearance, management democracy). Liao and Chen [4] explain the connotation of rural revitalization in terms of the basic meaning, general requirements, main content, key measures, main objectives, and so on, and lay a foundation for deepening the research. Second, combing the development process of rural revitalization has been the focus of some research. First of all, some scholars have explored its ideological origin, such as Zhang et al. [5], who think that the strategy of rural revitalization not only absorbs the idea of the development and integration of a Marxist countryside but also inherits and develops the theoretical achievements of Marxism in China. Many scholars, such as Wang, Su [6], Ye [3], Wang [7], and others, by exploring the concept of rural development since the reform and opening-up, found that it is gradually changing from the modernization of things to an emphasis on people. Secondly, there are specific stage studies based on representative figures and typical cases, as well as systematic research based on the century-old course of rural construction [8,9]. At the same time, Zhang et al. [10] and Wang [7] focused on the reform and opening-up of urban-rural relations and rural development research. Third, the application of the research methods of rural revitalization has been investigated. One class of methods is based on theoretical discussion, by deepening theoretical research to build a research framework [11], and the other is based on case studies to explore the development path of rural revitalization from theory to practice [12]. Fourth, discussion of the problems faced by rural revitalization has received attention in the literature. Liu et al. [13] found that the current agricultural rural development is facing the "four lack and five weaknesses" problems, that is, a lack of scientific planning, systems, long-term mechanisms, and entrepreneurial talent, and weak construction subjects, resource support, industrial base, scientific and technological innovation, and public services [14]. In addition, some scholars have studied the agricultural aspect and found that implementing incentives for the main body of rural revitalization is beneficial to play the main role [15,16].

To sum up, the current research on rural revitalization mainly focuses on the connotation, course, research method, problems, and so on, and there is a lack of research on its historical context and logical evolution since the founding of the People's Republic of China based on historical evolution. To this end, this paper takes the historical change of rural revitalization as the starting point, explores the historical context in the 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic and the logical law behind it, and explores the path choice of rural revitalization in the new era.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, in Section 2, we will review the historical evolution of rural revitalization in the 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China. In Section 3, we will explore the theory, history, reality evolution, and development of triple logic of rural revitalization. In Section 4, we will explore the path selection strategy of rural revitalization combined with the existing pattern. Finally, in Section 5, we will summarize the conclusions and look forward to the future work.

## 2. Historical Evolution of Rural Revitalization in the 70 Years since the Founding of the People's Republic of China

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, due to the development of national conditions and the world, the development of rural areas has been divided into two periods: The rural practice of the planned economic period from the founding to the reform and opening-up (1949–1978), and the practice since the reform and opening-up (1987–2019); see below for details.

### 2.1. 1949–1978: Practice of Rural Revitalization in the Period of Planned Economy

In the early period of the founding of the People's Republic of China, under the influence of international patterns, the Chinese government carried out many institutional reforms. First of all, we completed the land reform and “one transformation and three reforms” (i.e., “one transformation and three reforms” is the gradual realization of the country's socialist industrialization and the “three reforms” gradually realize the state's socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts, and capitalist industry and commerce), and then the planned economic system was gradually established through the reform of the people's commune and household registration, purchase, and sale, which provided a material basis for the priority development strategy of heavy industry. According to statistics, during the 25 years of the planned economic period from 1953 to 1978, the total “scissors difference” (i.e., in the exchange of industrial and agricultural products, the difference between the price of industrial products above value and the price of agricultural products below value. Since the dynamic trend of this difference is an open scissors shape, it is called “scissors difference”) in the price of industrial and agricultural products was estimated at 600 billion to 800 billion yuan (the date comes from the Development Research Center of the State Council estimation in 1986). Long-term heavy industry and light agriculture, in laying the foundation of the national industrial system, had a huge impact on agricultural and rural development, industrial-dominated agriculture, urban-dominated rural areas, unbalanced industrial and rural relations between urban and rural areas, and interest exchange patterns, which restricted the development of the rural agricultural economy [9,17]. According to statistics, the per capita grain output of agricultural labor in 1957–1977 decreased by 6.7%, and the per capita income of farmers increased by only 60 yuan [18].

### 2.2. 1978–Present: Practice of Rural Revitalization since the Reform and Opening-up

Since the reform and opening-up, with profound changes in the situation at home and abroad, the original planned economic system was broken, the market economy system was gradually established, and the rural development path changed. We think it experienced five stages: The preliminary revitalization of the rural economy, the exploration of improving rural governance, the construction of a new socialist countryside with Chinese characteristics, the construction of a new socialist countryside, and the path of rural revitalization in the new era (Table 1).

### 2.3. 1978–1988: Preliminary Revitalization of the Rural Economy

With the gradual deepening of the reform of the rural land system and the development of township enterprises, the system of “political and social unity” of the people's commune was broken, and the family contract responsibility system was gradually established. The decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on speeding up agricultural development, adopted by the Fourth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in 1979, began to break the shackles on “package-to-house” at the policy level, and then the Central No. 1 Document, issued for five consecutive years from 1982 to 1986, promoted rural reform and developed the rural economy by adjusting the industrial structure, adjusting the relationship between urban and rural, reforming the operating system, releasing rural industry and commerce, and dredging circulation channels. According to statistics, the rural gross domestic product increased 2.7 times between 1978 and 1988. According to Lin's [19] calculations, 46.9% of the increase in the total crop output in 1978–1984 came

from the reform of the rural land system (the content of rural land system reform includes the family responsibility contract system was implemented, the people's commune system was abolished, the administrative agency was established separately, and the township people's governments were established to develop township and village enterprises. The family contracting management system was initially formed and basically changed, and breakthroughs were made in rural reform). While the reform of the rural land system made progress, the township enterprises also ushered in new development. According to statistics, the rural gross domestic product increased 27 times in 1988 compared with 1978, of which the proportion of non-agricultural industry increased from 31.4% to 53.5%, and the Engel coefficient of rural residents (food expenditure as a proportion of total household expenditure) fell from 67.7% to 53.4% in 1978–1988 [20]. The proportion of the rural population among the total population decreased from 82.1% to 50.4%, and the per capita income of farmers increased 3.1 times, from 134 yuan to 545 yuan, with the proportion of household operating income (agricultural production income and other non-agricultural productive income) among the total income increasing from 26.8% to 83.2% (the date comes from the China Statistical Yearbook (1989)).

**Table 1.** Exploration and practice of rural revitalization in the 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

	Stage of Development	Typical Patterns	Construction Goals	Implementation Strategy
Rural practice in the period of planned economy (1949–1978)		Dazhai commune of Xiyang	Guide farmers to the socialist road; change agricultural country into industrial country	Implement land reform, collectivize agriculture, establish people's commune system, implement household registration system, separate urban and rural areas, prohibit mobility
	Preliminary revitalization of rural economy (1978–1988)	Xiaogang village of Fengyang	Conduct preliminary revitalization of rural economy	Establish system of contract management of family joint production, abolish people's commune system, set up township government separately from administrative society, develop township enterprises, initially liberalize household registration system, allow movement of people
	Exploration of agricultural industrialization and improvement of rural governance (1988–1998)	Sanyuanzhu village of Shouguang	Carry out agricultural industrialization and improve rural governance	Transform rural economy to commercial, industrialize and modernize, control and regulate the transfer of rural labor force, improve rural grassroots organizations, promote the flow of urban and rural factors
Rural practice since reform and opening-up (1978–present)	Building a new socialist countryside with Chinese characteristics (1998–2005)	Huaxi village of Jiangyin	Build a new socialist countryside with Chinese characteristics	Stabilize and improve basic management system in rural areas, promote reform of rural taxes and fees, promote construction of new rural areas from three aspects: economy, politics, and culture
	Building a new socialist countryside (2005–2012)	Wang village of Xiqing district, Huangcheng village of Yangcheng, Zhuge village of Lanx	Build a new socialist countryside	In accordance with general requirements of "production and development, well-off life, rural civilization, clean village appearance and management democracy," promote construction of a new socialist countryside in four aspects of economy, politics, culture, and society
	Path of rural revitalization in the new era (2012–present)	Lujia village of Anji, Zhanqi village of Pidu district, Gengdian village of Chiping	Implement the strategy of rural revitalization and realize overall revitalization of rural areas	In accordance with general requirements of "industrial prosperity, ecological livability, rural civilization, effective governance and affluence in life," comprehensively promote rural reform and economic and social development from the five aspects of economy, politics, culture, society, and ecology, then open the road of rural revitalization in a new era

Source: Authors, based on literature.

#### 2.4. 1988–1998: Exploration of Agricultural Industrialization and Improvement of Rural Governance

With the establishment and perfection of the family contract responsibility system (i.e., the family contract responsibility system is a form of agricultural production responsibility system in which farmers take households as the unit, and contract land to collective economic organizations (mainly villages and groups) for production means and production tasks), the agricultural production efficiency constantly improved, and the organic connection between small farmers and the big market became a new topic for agricultural development. By 1999, there were 303,000 agricultural industrialization

organizations, which led to 39 million households with an average income of more than 800 yuan (the date comes from the China Agricultural Yearbook (2000)). At the same time as the change in the rural management system, the household registration system gradually relaxed, and the population flow gradually changed from control to normal guidance. The number of migrant workers who went out to work increased from 30 million to about 65 million in 1989–1998 [21]. With the cancellation of the people's commune in 1985, a series of township and village and other grassroots organizations were gradually established, and then a series of townships, towns, and villages as the main body of the grassroots governance model began to form. To solve the paralysis and semi-paralysis of grassroots organizations and realize efficient operation at the grassroots level, the central government continuously improved the organizational and governance methods by formulating laws and policy documents, such as the Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China (Trial), and the construction and governance capacity of the rural grassroots party organizations to a certain extent.

#### *2.5. 1998–2005: Building a New Socialist Countryside with Chinese Characteristics*

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, on the basis of taking full account of the phased characteristics of rural development, the Central Committee proposed building a new socialist countryside with Chinese characteristics and promoted the construction of new rural areas from three aspects: Economy, politics, and culture. As rural productivity continued to improve, grassroots organizations improved, and the spiritual outlook changed significantly. At the same time, farmers' income growth faced challenges; according to statistics, the annual per capita net income growth for rural residents was no more than 5% from 1998 to 2000, and in some years even down to 2%. At the same time, the income gap between urban and rural areas gradually widened, from 2.51:1 in 1998 to 3.22:1 (the date are compiled according to the China Statistical Yearbook (1999–2006)) in 2005. To address this, the central government focused on rural tax and fee reform to promote rural economic and social development, including adjusting the income distribution in the economy, strengthening the system of grassroots organizations in politics, and improving the rural spiritual outlook by taking culture and technology to the countryside.

#### *2.6. 2005–2012: Building a New Socialist Countryside*

Since the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed building a well-off society in an all-round way, there was a gap between expectation and realization in rural areas. By the end of 2004, the realization of well-off rural areas in the country was only at 21.6%, and the imbalance in the development of the rural economy, politics, and culture became increasingly prominent. To this end, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee put forward general requirements for building a new socialist countryside, including production and development, well-off life, rural civilization, clean village appearance, and democratic management, on the basis of economic, political, cultural, and sustainable development. According to statistics, the construction of rural areas since the construction of the new socialist countryside made remarkable progress. From 2005 to 2012, the average annual growth rate of the total agricultural output was 12.9%, of grain production was 2.9%, and of farmers' per capita net income was 13.5% (the date are compiled according to the China Statistical Abstract 2018). Rural infrastructure and people's livelihood systems gradually improved, and the number of insured rural persons reached 320 million (the date comes from the China Agricultural Yearbook (2013)). This was another "golden period" for rural development, but the deep-seated problems remained; for instance, the trend of a widening income gap between urban and rural areas did not fundamentally change: The income gap between urban and rural residents in 2005–2012 was above 3.10:1, and even in some years reached 3.33:1 (the date are compiled according to the China Statistical Abstract 2018). How to further stimulate the vitality of rural development, improve the imbalance between urban and rural development, and promote the sustainable development of rural areas have been new requirements for rural development in the new era.



### 2.7. 2012–Present: The Road of Rural Revitalization in the New Era

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the development of rural areas entered a new era. First of all, the characteristics of agricultural development are obvious. In 2016, China's total grain output as well as its production of agricultural bean products and aquatic products ranked first in the world; at the same time, as a country with a large population, the demand and development potential of the agricultural products market are huge. Secondly, the income channel of farmers changed significantly, and the income channels of rural residents became more diversified, gradually forming multiple streams, with wage income as the main factor and family operating income as the supplement since 2012. Wage income exceeded household income for the first time and became a major source of income for farmers in 2015. The number of migrant workers increased by 19.1 million to 281.71 million (the data are compiled according to monitoring reports of migrant workers (2014–2018)) from 2012 to 2016, and migrant workers became an important channel for farmers to earn income. Finally, the trend of deterioration of the rural ecological environment was curbed and controlled under the guidance of the theories of "beautiful countryside" and "two mountains" (i.e., lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets). According to statistics, the average annual growth rate of fertilizer, agricultural film, and pesticide use from 2012 to 2016 was 1%, 3%, and −0.4%, respectively, significantly lower than the average annual growth rate from 2002 to 2012 (3%, 4.5%, and 3.3%) (the data are compiled according to the China Rural Statistics Yearbook (2003–2013)). While there was progress in rural development, some deep-seated contradictions and problems gradually emerged. First, the contradiction between urban and rural dual structure became more prominent, and the imbalance between urban and rural development was not fundamentally reversed. Second, under the influence of the imbalance of urban and rural development, the problem of unbalanced and inadequate development within rural areas gradually emerged and became an important force restricting the sustainable development of rural areas. Third, rural development in some areas still attaches importance to the economy and neglects social development, and many policies have a short-term tendency and lack long-term planning. To this end, the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forward the implementation of the strategy of rural revitalization, in accordance with the general requirements of "industry prosperity, ecological livability, rural civilization, effective governance, living prosperity" to promote rural revitalization.

In the 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the practice of rural revitalization has not been smooth sailing. There have been both successful experiences and lessons in failure, from which we can obtain two concepts: First, rural development is closely related to the destiny of the country. Without a good environment for domestic and foreign development, rural development will be difficult. Between the founding of the People's Republic of China and the reform and opening-up, the rural development path was affected by the external environment and the national development strategy, which made rural development fail to achieve the expected goal. Second, the development of rural areas has a distinct imprint of the times. Since the reform and opening-up and in its different periods, the path of rural development has undergone remarkable transformations, which have distinct stage characteristics.

### 3. The Triple Logic of Rural Revitalization

The development and evolution of the rural revitalization strategy had a unique theoretical basis and logical laws. First, it was formed and developed on the basis of summing up the development process of human history, absorbing and drawing on the development experience of industrialization and urbanization in western countries [17,22]. Second, it follows the development context of China's rural areas [5].

### 3.1. The Theoretical Evolution Logic of Rural Revitalization

The strategy of rural revitalization is an important part of Xi Jinping's social thought with Chinese characteristics in the new era, which is an inheritance and development of Marxism, and the development of rural thought of the Communist Party of China based on the basic viewpoint of Marxism.

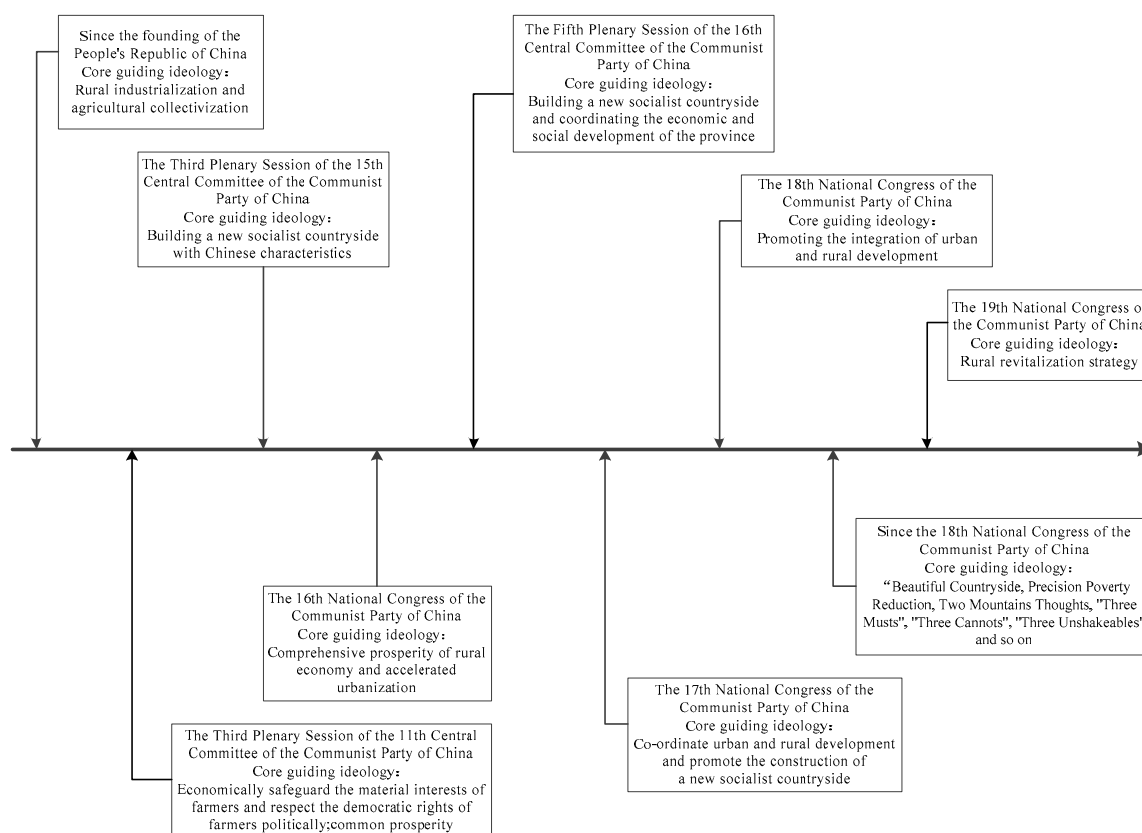
#### 3.1.1. The Basic Marxist Point of View

Marxist materialism holds that the contradiction between productivity and production, economic foundation, and superstructure is the basic contradiction of human society [23]. Marx and Engels studied the development of rural areas from the perspective of materialism, and found that the development of productive forces is the root cause of rural decline, while the division of labor and specialization are direct causes of the separation of urban and rural areas and the decline of rural areas [24]. To change this reality, we need to break the original pattern of urban and rural structure and the division of labor, and build an industrial pattern of urban and rural integration and development. The strategy of rural revitalization is based on absorbing Marxist ideas on rural development and urban-rural integration [5], and through the benign interaction between urban and rural areas, it should stimulate the intrinsic motivation of rural development, improve the self-producing capacity of rural areas, consolidate the basic position of agriculture, and promote the urban and rural structure from separation to integration, thus changing the backwardness of agriculture and rural development and the weak sustainable development capacity [25].

#### 3.1.2. Enriching and Developing the Rural Thought of the Communist Party of China

Chinese Communists combine the basic principles of Marxist thought with the reality of China, and constantly enrich the theoretical achievements of the Chinafication of Marxism to guide the development of China's rural areas. Mao Zedong believed that "the realization of rural industrialization is the great and bright future of rural areas" (which comes from the Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the People's Republic of China (Volume 8)). After the founding of the People's Republic of China, through land reform, socialist reform of agriculture, the establishment of people's communes, and other means, a new path of agricultural rural development was explored, through twists and turns, but China's economic development and reform and opening-up laid a solid foundation. Deng Xiaoping thought that "whether the Chinese economy can develop or not depends on whether the rural areas can develop and whether the peasant life is better" (which comes from the Anthology of Deng Xiaoping (Volume III)), and then he put forward the economic protection of farmers' material interests and political respect for the democratic rights of farmers, in accordance with the non-balanced development strategy, first rich and then rich, and finally realized the development of common prosperity, starting a new journey of rural development. Jiang Zemin focused on adjusting the industrial structure and developing township enterprises, and started the construction of a new socialist countryside with Chinese characteristics from three aspects: Economy, politics, and culture [7]. Based on the goal of building a well-off society in an all-round way, Hu Jintao raised the importance of the idea of "three rural" (agriculture, rural areas, farmers) to a new height and put forward a "20-word policy" (i.e., production and development, well-off life, rural civilization, clean village appearance, democratic management) for building a new socialist countryside from four aspects: Economy, politics, culture, and society [6]. Since the 18th National Congress, Comrade Xi Jinping, in combination with the practice of rural development in China, has integrated the concepts of rural development, such as "beautiful countryside", "precision poverty alleviation", "two mountains" (i.e., lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets) and "three musts" (i.e., China must be strong, agriculture must be strong; China must be beautiful, rural must be beautiful; China must be rich, farmers must be rich), and "three cannots" (i.e., we cannot ignore agriculture at any time, we cannot forget farmers, we cannot ignore the countryside) and "three unshakeables" (i.e., unswervingly deepen rural reform, accelerate rural

development, safeguard rural harmony and stability) into rural practice, with implementation of a strategy of rural revitalization as the method to achieve overall revitalization of the countryside (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The historical evolution of the rural thought of Communist Party of China in the 70 years of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Source: Authors, based on the literature.

It can be seen that the rural thought of the Communist Party of China has gone from “the farmer has his fields” to the modernization of agriculture, from the family contract to the separation of powers, from the new socialist countryside to rural revitalization, and the rural development of ideas and objectives is increasingly diversified. All this is intended not only to maintain the continuity of ideas and goals but also to be in accordance with the requirements of the new era, to expand development ideas and improve development goals, so that the goal of agricultural rural modernization from the simple emphasis on things; that is, industry and infrastructure modernization, and changes to paying more attention to people, which is the modernization of farmers to expand [3].

### 3.2. The Logic of the Historical Evolution of Rural Revitalization

Both developed countries and developing countries, in the process of economic development, will experience the decline and revitalization of rural areas. To this end, China needs to conform to the law of world economic development and explore the path of rural revitalization with Chinese characteristics.

#### 3.2.1. Conform to the Law of World Economic Development

Both European and American developed countries and rising stars, such as Japan and South Korea, have faced urban–rural conflicts in the process of industrialization and urbanization. Especially when the level of urbanization reaches about 50%, a country will generally experience the process of rural decline to recovery [22]. For example, in the United States between the 1940s and 1950s, as the income gap between urban and rural residents widened, the gap between the infrastructure and public



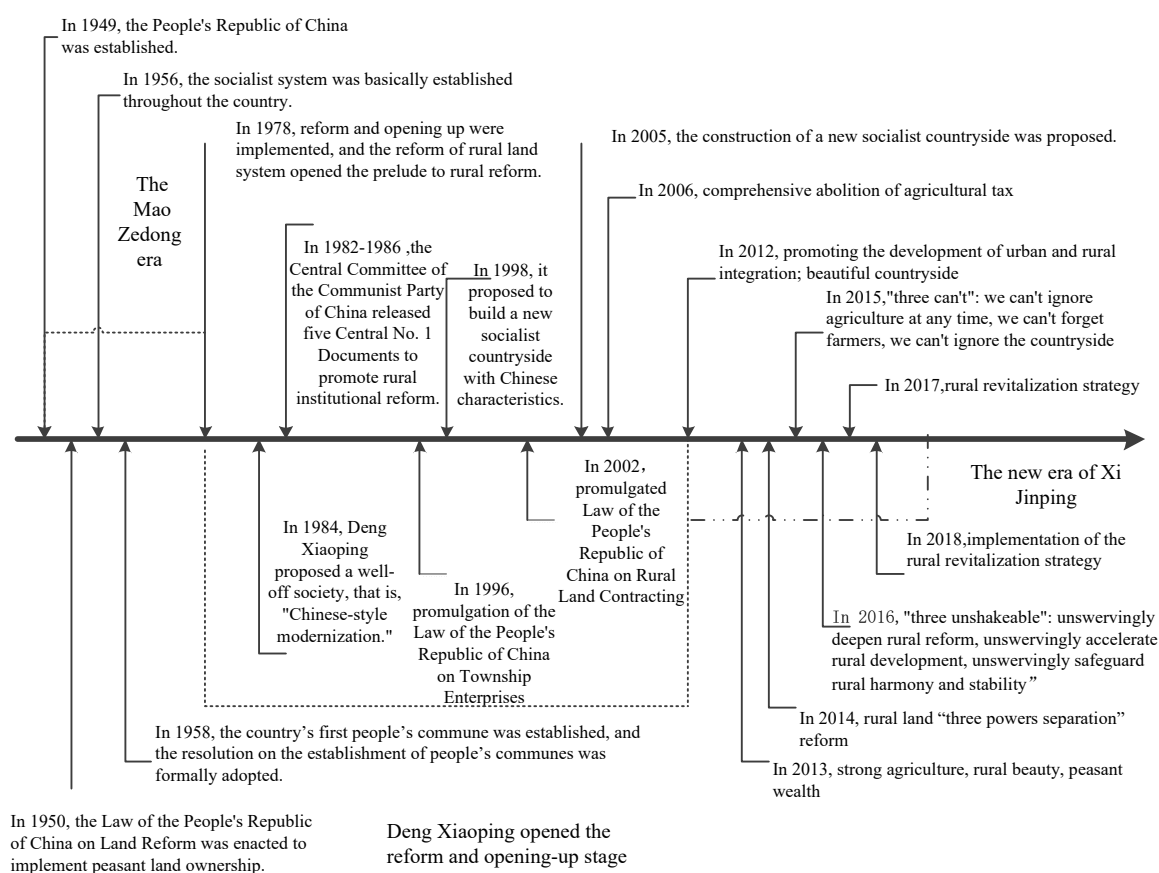
services in urban and rural areas also widened. To this end, the United States implemented new urban development and construction to promote rural revival. Great Britain, France, and other European countries in the process of industrialization and urbanization have faced the “urban disease” and rural backwardness of the double test. To address this, Great Britain and France implemented rural central village construction, rural revitalization plans, and other policy initiatives to deal with the decline of rural areas and crack the urban and rural development dilemma [26]. Since the 1970s, East Asian economies, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, have implemented village-building movements, new village construction, and rural regeneration programs in response to rural decline [5]. In 2018, the urbanization rate of the residential population in China (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) was 59.6%, and the urbanization rate of the registered household population was 43.4%. In view of the development trend of the world economy, measures need to be taken to deal with rural recession in the development process.

### 3.2.2. The Historical Continuation of Centuries-Old Rural Practice

Since the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, China began a 100-year exploration of rural revitalization, from rural construction represented by intellectuals, such as Liang Shuming, Yan Yangchu, and Lu Zuofu [27], through the rural revival plan carried out by the government of the Republic of China and the rural revolutionary movement under the leadership of the Communist Party, to the rural construction practice and exploration after the founding of the People’s Republic and the construction of the countryside under the conditions of market economy since the reform and opening-up [5]. Although they are different ideas and different paths, the goal is to achieve national revitalization, national prosperity, and people’s happiness, realizing that rural revitalization is the inheritance and development of rural practice in China in the past century.

### 3.2.3. The Historical Mission of China’s Economic Development

Since the founding of the Communist Party of China, different historical missions and development strategies have been formed to meet the difficulties and challenges in the development process, thus exerting different influences on the development of rural areas. It is roughly divided into three stages [23]. The first stage was from the founding of the People’s Republic to the reform and opening-up, known as the Mao Zedong era; the main problem to be solved during this period was “standing up”. At that time, in the context of rapid changes in the international environment, guaranteeing national survival and security became the primary issue, and therefore the priority was to develop a strategy for heavy industry and gradually establish a planned economic system, and the countryside became the most important source of original capital accumulation in the initial stage of the national economy. The second stage was from the reform and opening-up to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, called the Deng Xiaoping era. The main problem to be solved during this period was “getting rich”. Its basic issue was to improve the national economic strength and people’s living standards. Under the condition that the international environment was significantly improved, the Chinese Communists objectively analyzed the international situation and realized common prosperity through internal reform and opening up to the outside world. Villages gradually changed from a one-way supply of raw capital accumulation to deep integration into the national economic system, and urban–rural relations gradually changed from uneven development to integration. The third stage has been since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, known as the new era of Xi Jinping. Based on the first two stages of development, we will focus on solving the problem of “strengthening up”; big but not strong cannot reflect socialism with Chinese characteristics. Through all-round reform, we can solve the deep-seated contradictions and problems facing China’s economic development, so as to adapt to the development and changes of the main contradictions in society. The strategy of rural revitalization is to realize the sustainable development of rural farmers by solving the problem of unbalanced urban and rural development and inadequate rural development (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Timeline of the historical evolution of rural revitalization in the 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Source: Authors, based on the literature.

### 3.3. The Realistic Development Logic of Rural Revitalization

The realistic development logic of rural revitalization is based on realistic conditions, such as national conditions and the historical orientation of national development, and addresses why the strategy of rural revitalization should be implemented. On this basis, and combined with the material and institutional basis of the current national economic development, it discusses the possibility and feasibility of implementing rural revitalization and strengthening the theoretical persuasion.

#### 3.3.1. The Realistic Need for Rural Revitalization

The strategy of rural revitalization not only draws on the law of development of the world economy but is also a positive response to the historical mission of China's economic development, and is a realistic choice based on the national conditions.

- (1) The special national conditions determine that the countryside cannot decline.

The large population base, especially the large rural population, and regional differences have determined the complexity and arduousness of the rural development path in China. Wu Jingchao, in his book *The Way Out for the Fourth Country*, divided the countries of the world into four categories and analyzed the path of modernization in the four types of countries. He put forward the idea of the fourth country with more people and less land, and a high proportion of agricultural population to achieve modernization, which needs to follow its own characteristics of the development path; China, India, and other Asian countries are in this category. As General Secretary Xi Jinping said, "Even if China's urbanization rate reaches 70%, there are still 4.5 billion people living in rural areas," which is a force and a group that cannot be ignored in the process of national modernization [21]. At the

same time, the relationship between urban and rural areas is not separate, but inextricably linked, which is the community of destiny, different values, and functional interactions, and together form a well-off society.

- (2) The phase characteristics of China's economic development require rural revitalization.

At present, China's economy is moving from high-speed development to high-quality development, in the pursuit of quality economic development. The idea of solving the problem of "three rural" (agriculture, rural areas, farmers) with urbanization faces challenges in the process; the problem of "three rural", represented by agriculture marginalization, rural hollowing, and farmer aging, is becoming more prominent; there is an urgent need to change the development thinking, take industrial prosperity as a breakthrough, and make the countryside into a beautiful village with integrated production, life, and ecological function.

- (3) Agricultural and rural areas are the shortcomings and weak links in achieving national rejuvenation.

After 70 years of development, especially 40 years of reform and opening-up, the rural landscape and the comprehensive capacity of agricultural and rural areas have been significantly improved. The total value of agricultural production increased from 101.85 billion yuan in 1978 to 647.34 billion yuan in 2018, the per capita net income of farmers increased from 133.6 yuan in 1978 to 10,772 yuan in 2015, and the per capita disposable income of rural residents reached 14,617 yuan (the data come from the China Statistical Abstract 2018 and the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin) in 2018. At the same time, the large income gap between urban and rural residents remains, with the per capita disposable income of rural residents in 2018 being only 37.2% (the data are based on the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin) of the urban population. Problems, such as an imperfect livelihood security system for rural people, a relative lag in infrastructure, and increasingly tight ecological environment constraints, have become increasingly prominent, hindering the sustainable development of rural agriculture.

- (4) The development and change of the main contradictions in our society put new and higher demands on the development of the countryside.

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China puts forward that the main contradiction in our society is "the contradiction between the people's growing need for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development". Influenced by historical factors, the imbalance of urban and rural development and inadequate rural development have become the outstanding contradiction of economic development, which not only affects the sustainable development of agricultural and rural areas but also restricts urbanization and even the whole national economic development. Therefore, it is urgent to promote the all-round development of rural areas through top-level design, and completely reverse the structural contradictions in the imbalanced urban and rural development and inadequate rural development, and the strategy of rural revitalization is a positive response to this problem.

### 3.3.2. The Realistic Basis for Rural Revitalization

- (1) The theoretical guarantee of implementing rural revitalization.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has conducted in-depth research in Anhui, Hubei, Hunan, and Jilin, and listened extensively to reports on the work of all parties and learned about the current situation of rural development. In this process, the beautiful countryside, precision poverty alleviation, two mountains theory, three musts, three cannots, three unshakeables, and three rural series (agriculture, rural areas, farmers) were put forward as new ideas, new opinions, and new requirements, which are the crystallization of

the collective wisdom (i.e., the wisdom comes from people and it is refined by a new generation of government) of the Central Committee with Comrade Xi as the core, laying an ideological foundation and providing a theoretical guarantee for the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

(2) The material basis of rural revitalization is stronger.

Since the reform and opening-up, the country's comprehensive national strength has been significantly improved, and the material basis for promoting rural revitalization has become more abundant. In 2018, the gross domestic product was 90.03 trillion yuan, the national fiscal revenue was 162 times the 113.2 billion yuan in 1978, the industrial structure was increasingly optimized, and the "321" industrial pattern was gradually forming. The urbanization rate of the resident population reached 59.6%, and the proportion of urban workers reached 56.0%. Especially since the 18th National Congress, the capacity of food production has steadily improved, and structural reforms on the supply side of agriculture have begun to bear fruit. The income gap between urban and rural areas continued to narrow, with the ratio of per capita disposable income of urban and rural residents falling from 3.10:1 in 2012 to 2.69:1 (the data come from the China Statistical Abstract 2018 and the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin) in 2018. Rural people's livelihood system is improving day by day, the fight against poverty has made decisive progress, the number of rural poor decreased by 82.39 million people (the date based on 2010 constant price per capita consumption standard of 2300 yuan) in 2012–2018, the incidence of poverty fell to 1.7% (the date come from the China Statistical Abstract 2018 and the 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin), and the rural ecological environment has been significantly improved (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Material basis of rural revitalization since the reform and opening-up.

Index	1978	2012	2018
Gross domestic product (GDP) (RMB 100 million)	3678.8	540,367.4	900,309
Revenue (RMB 100 million)	1132.26	117,253.52	183,352
Gross agricultural production (RMB 100 million)	1018.5	50,902.3	64,734
GDP per capita (RMB)	385	40,007	64,644
Rural per capita net income (RMB)	133.6	7916.6	14,617
Rural poor (10,000)	about 25,000	9899	1660
Incidence of rural poverty (%)	30.7	10.2	1.7
Urbanization rate of resident population (%)	17.9	52.6	59.6

① China Statistical Abstract 2018 and 2018 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin. ② Gross domestic product, gross agricultural product, fiscal revenue, and per capita GDP are based on current prices. ③ Data on rural per capita net income in 2018 are rural per capita disposable income in 2018; there was no rural per capita net income indicator in 2016, and rural disposable income was used. ④ In 1978, the standard of the rural poor (households) was "three households"; that is, "food is not fruity, clothes do not cover, housing does not shelter from the rain," and in 2012 and 2018 the standard for rural poor people was the 2300 yuan per capita constant price in 2010. Source: Authors, based on literature.

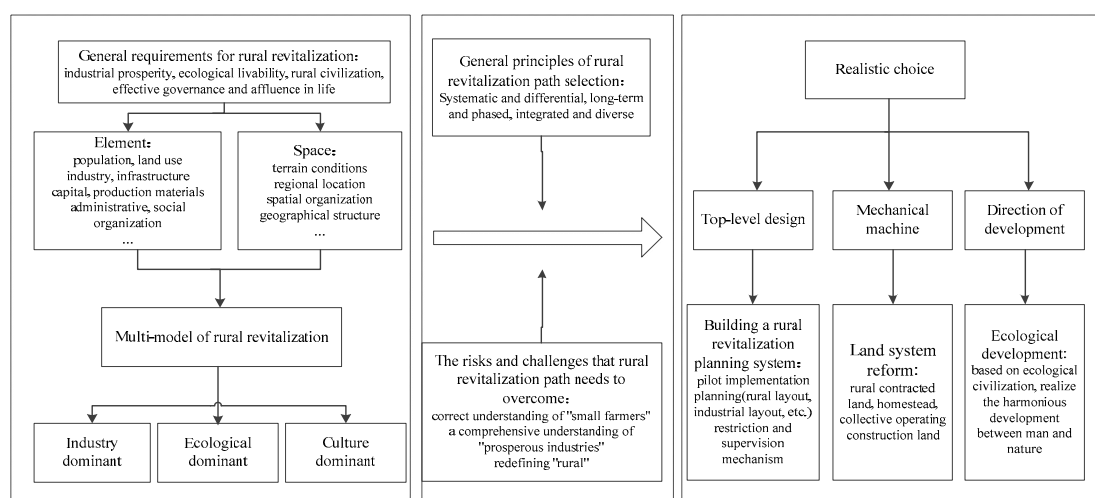
(3) Practical experience since the construction of rural areas since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, all over the country the "three rural" (agriculture, rural areas, farmers) work has accumulated rich experience. In 2018, Zhejiang Province implemented the "thousand village demonstration and ten thousand village rectification" project for 15 years and won the United Nations' Earth Guard Award. The efforts and achievements of Zhejiang Province in promoting the construction of ecological civilization have been recognized by the international community, which provides useful exploration for the "beautiful countryside" construction. The reform of "three plots of land" (i.e., the reform of rural land acquisition, the entering of collectively-owned construction land into the market, and the reform of the housing site system) that started in 2015 has accumulated rich experience in promoting the reform of national contracted

land, homesteads, and collective operating construction land. In the process of eradicating poverty, the selection of the first secretary for poor villages, the deployment of a poverty alleviation task force, and other working methods provide new ideas for rural revitalization [21].

#### 4. The Path Selection Strategy of Rural Revitalization

Whether rural revitalization can achieve the established goals and complement rural development depends not only on the top design of the strategy but also on the path of rural revitalization, which is the action arrangement that transforms the strategy into concrete practice. Therefore, the path of rural revitalization should not only combine regional characteristics, strengthening the top-level design, but also adhere to the principle of seeking truth from facts in concrete practice, overcome traditional thinking, and prevent potential risks (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Path selection strategy chart for rural revitalization. Source: Authors, based on the literature.

##### 4.1. The Model Exploration Stage of Rural Revitalization

Since the implementation of the strategy of rural revitalization, various places have explored, according to their own regional characteristics, both comprehensive consideration at the provincial level and case analysis from the village perspective [12,28,29], which has formed a unique development model that plays an extremely important role in the path selection of rural revitalization.

###### 4.1.1. Summary of Existing Patterns

At present, in the course of practicing rural revitalization, three main development paths have gradually formed: The industrial model, the ecological model, and the cultural model, which were combined with the existing industrial base, ecological environment, and cultural heritage.

###### (1) Industrial model

The industrial model refers to the rural revitalization model formed by cultivating or relying on the core industry of the countryside and forming an industrial concentration and obvious characteristics. The industrial model is suitable for villages with comparative advantages in resources and locations, such as Zhanqi village in Sichuan Province, Gengdian village in Shandong Province, and Yangshi village in Jiangsu Province.

###### (2) Ecological model

The ecological model refers to the development concept of “green water, green mountain is Jinshan Yinshan” as a guide, based on the ecological environment and the development of the tourism,



entertainment, and leisure industries to build an ecological living environment. The ecological model is suitable for villages with comparative advantages in ecological environment and location conditions, especially in urban suburbs, such as Lujia village in Zhejiang Province and Binglang village in Hainan Province.

### (3) Cultural model

The cultural model refers to the integration of cultural development with rural development by deeply excavating farming civilization and farming culture under the support of traditional culture and specific regional culture. The cultural model is applicable to villages with excellent traditional culture, and by integrating cultural development with rural development, a new model of rural revitalization is formed, such as Dazhai and Huangcheng villages in Shanxi Province, Zhuge village in Zhejiang Province, and Peitian ancient village in Fujian Province [30].

#### 4.1.2. Insufficient in Existing Mode

Although the current model of rural revitalization has its own characteristics, it is subject to the limitations of industry, ecology, and culture, and may have a regional reference function, but it is still insufficient in terms of national rural revitalization models.

##### (1) The existing models are not representative.

After all, the country's 2.449 million natural villages (533,000 administrative villages), such as Gengdian village in Shandong Province, Zhanqi village in Sichuan Province, Lujia village in Zhejiang Province, and Huangcheng village in Shanxi Province, which can form an industrial, ecological, cultural rural revitalization model of the village, are a minority. More rural areas lack outstanding advantages in terms of their industrial base, cultural heritage, and ecological environment, but they have certain economic foundations, cultural resources, and local characteristics, and promoting the revitalization of these "ordinary" villages as more representative and exemplary is important for the realization of rural revitalization.

##### (2) Existing models cannot meet the needs of rural revitalization.

China is a large country with a population of nearly 1.4 billion people and unbalanced economic development between the eastern, central, and western regions, and the development of the countryside has its own characteristics. The current model of rural revitalization, which is dominated by industry, ecology, and culture, cannot meet the realistic needs of rural revitalization in China. With economic development and the increasingly diversified needs of the population, the trend of integrating one, two, and three industries in the countryside is becoming more obvious, and the development path of diversification will be the strategic choice of rural development in the future. Therefore, the path of rural revitalization should not only focus on the present but also consider the long term, for the purpose of alleviating poverty and constructing a well-off society, as well as focus on constructing a socialist modern power to meet the grand goal.

#### 4.2. General Principles of Selecting a Rural Revitalization Path

The strategy of rural revitalization, as the general representation of the overall national "three rural" (agriculture, rural areas, farmers) concept against the background of the new era, is the basic strategy to follow to promote the modernization of agricultural and rural areas. Considering the basic national conditions and the characteristics of regional development in China, we should pay attention to the organic link between general principles and special policies in the implementation of rural revitalization, and explore its path with Chinese characteristics.

#### 4.2.1. Adhere to Organic Integration between the System of Rural Revitalization and Differences in Regional Development

The strategy of rural revitalization is the overall plan of the country to realize the modernization of agriculture and rural areas, which not only considers diverse objectives but also pays attention to the system, so as to realize the all-round development of the rural economy and society. Due to the obvious differences between regions and the specific implementation of the strategy in various regions, selection of the path should pay attention to the combination of systematic and regional development of rural revitalization, so as to explore the development path that is in line with the strategy, suitable for the characteristics of regional development, and can be carried out in practice. Thus, we can avoid the tendency of uniformity of the revitalization mode and promote a diversified and characteristic revitalization of the countryside [12].

#### 4.2.2. Adhere to Organic Integration between Long-Term Integration of Rural Revitalization and the Stage of Rural Development

Rural revitalization is an important part of building a modern socialist power in the new era, and the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forward the national development goal of a new “three-step walk”. The rural revitalization strategy is consistent with the country’s development goals and also has short-, medium-, and long-term development plans. Adhering to the long-term nature of rural revitalization is conducive not only to the orderly progress of the strategy in accordance with the established goals but also to avoiding short-term behavior, such as impatience and seedling promotion, so as to overcome the tendency of applying tactics to strategic problems. At the same time, combined with the development stage of the countryside, while adhering to the long-term nature of rural revitalization, we should grasp the stage characteristics of rural development, formulate a feasible rural development path, and realize the organic unity of the two.

#### 4.2.3. Insist on Organic Integration between Rural Revitalization and the Diversity of Farmers’ Needs

The strategy of rural revitalization is based on the overall strategy of the country, taking the internal relationship between urban and rural areas, agricultural and non-agricultural industries, farmers, and citizens into account. At present, the links between agricultural and rural modernization and urban and rural development, industrial structure, infrastructure, public services, and ecological environment are becoming increasingly close, and the integration trend is increasingly obvious. With the development of the rural economy and the improvement of farmers’ income level, farmers’ needs are becoming more diversified, with more attention paid to the realization of their own value. Therefore, in the choice of the path of rural revitalization, we should respect this objective trend, with farmers at the center, to realize the organic integration of rural rejuvenation and the diversity of farmers’ needs.

### 4.3. *The Realistic Choice of the Path of Rural Revitalization*

The realistic choice of the rural revitalization path should be guided by the general requirements of the strategy, grasping the characteristics of the countryside, firmly determining the reform, taking the reform of the key areas as the breakthrough, and promoting the strategy. At the same time, there is a clear understanding of the risks and challenges faced in the process of rural revitalization, so as to achieve the effect of doing more with less.

#### 4.3.1. Key Breakthrough Scored in Rural Revitalization

Rural revitalization involves different areas of rural development, such as industry, ecology, society, culture, and governance, and it is necessary to solve the current contradictions and problems but also to conduct long-term planning. To this end, in the process of implementation, the strategy of

rural revitalization should seize the key areas to make key breakthroughs, step by step, so as to achieve the goal.

(1) Building a planning system for rural revitalization as the guide

In view of the chaos that existed in the process of the original rural construction, in the practice of rural revitalization, first, we need to formulate feasible implementation plans and advance planning, which not only helps to improve the progress of implementation but also helps to prevent one-sided pursuit of “high” “image projects” or “face projects,” to effectively put rural revitalization into practice and explore its path in line with the region. Secondly, we need to build a good restraint and supervision mechanism, by forming corresponding supervision and inspection institutions, and effectively grasp the implementation of the rural revitalization plan, and truly realize “one action is better than a dozen programs”.

(2) The dynamic mechanism of forming rural revitalization by reforming the land system

Land is the most important factor of production in rural areas, and the most potential natural resource for rural revitalization. Due to the lag of land reform, the inefficient utilization of land resources has become an important factor restricting the revitalization of rural areas. To this end, taking the reform of “three plots of land” (rural contracted land, homesteads, collective operating construction land) as a breakthrough, we should deepen the reform of the rural land system, which will not only help to release the vitality of rural development but also solve the “people”, “money”, “land” problem [31].

(3) Leading by ecological development

In view of China’s unique dual structure of urban and rural areas, economic development is in the “four” (industrialization, informatization, urbanization, agricultural modernization) integration of the development stage, so the process of implementing rural revitalization must not be in accordance with the modern thinking of industrial civilization, taking the old idea of pollution first and then treatment, but be based on ecological civilization, adhering to the path of rural revitalization of green development to achieve the harmonious development of man and nature [25].

#### 4.3.2. Avoid Potential Cognitive and Practical Risks

The process of implementing rural revitalization should pay attention to local conditions, adhere to the general principles and the specific situation of the combination, and adhere to truth-seeking. This not only requires us to grasp the importance of the overall strategy of rural revitalization but also to free the mind in the process of concrete operation.

(1) A correct understanding of the position and role of “small farmers” in rural revitalization

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China puts forward the concept of an organic link between small farmers and modern agricultural development in the implementation of the strategy of rural revitalization. This shows that the Central Committee recognizes the basic national conditions of “big country small farmers” and the reality that small farmers will have a long-term existence, and proposes the future development direction of small farmers, that is, the organic connection between small farmers and modern agricultural development. This will not only help to consolidate the main position of small farmers in China’s agricultural development but also lay a solid base for rural revitalization [6].

(2) A comprehensive understanding of “industry boom” and prevention of excessive industrialization

Emancipating and developing productive forces and revitalizing the rural economy are the first priorities of rural revitalization. According to the general requirements of the rural revitalization strategy, “industry prosperity” is at the core. In the process of implementing the strategy, we should have a full understanding of the prosperity of the industry, which emphasizes supporting the industries related to rural farmers in agriculture, with the aim of developing agriculture, revitalizing the countryside, and serving the peasants, rather than referring to all areas of the countryside to carry out industrialization development. Therefore, in the specific implementation process, this will prevent excessive industrialization [32] and avoid a one-sided understanding.

### (3) Redefining the meaning and extension of “rural”

With the development of the economy, the line between urban and rural areas is becoming more blurred, and the urban–rural division by administrative means is becoming less suitable for the needs of economic and social development, and has a negative impact on the free flow of factors between urban and rural areas. At the same time, we must change the one-sidedness of rural cognition under the urban–rural dual structure. Rural refers not only to farmers’ villages but to all Chinese villages; it is a “see the mountains, see the water, stay homesick” place. Therefore, it is urgent to break the development idea of relying on the administrative urban–rural division, and promote the development of urban–rural integration through unified planning between urban and rural areas.

## 5. Conclusions and Future Work

### (1) Rural revitalization and national development are mutually reinforcing and indispensable.

Reviewing the development of rural China in modern times, it is not difficult to find that a “win-win” situation can be achieved when there is a positive interaction between rural development and the national strategy; otherwise, it may face development difficulties that are at odds with each other, which is not conducive to the sustainable development of the country or to the rural overall revitalization.

### (2) The development of rural revitalization requires the guidance of national policies.

Since the founding of New China, the Party Central Committee has put forward a series of ideas and countermeasures for rural development. This is not only a practical need to solve the “three rural” issues but also a necessary link to guide the orderly and healthy development of rural areas. Only in this way can we better deal with the problems faced by rural development at different stages of development, so as to find a balance in solving practical problems and planning long-term development, and then advance the rural revitalization strategy in an orderly manner.

### (3) The realization of rural revitalization strategy depends on the practice of rural development.

Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth. Only by combining different rural development models with the actual development of the region can we find out the methods and countermeasures suitable for the rural development in the region.

### (4) The strategy of rural revitalization should not only strengthen the top-level design but also focus on realistic choices.

On the one hand, in accordance with the overall requirements of the rural revitalization strategy, a rural revitalization overall plan with local characteristics was formulated in a timely manner, and policy breakthroughs, such as the reform of the land system, were explored to explore breakthroughs in rural revitalization. On the other hand, it is necessary to accurately grasp the connotation and extension of related concepts, such as “small farmers”, “prosperous industries”, and “rural areas”, so as to avoid risks and challenges that may be faced in rural revitalization practices and promote rural revitalization.

Although this article explored the historical context, development logic, and path selection of rural development, the rural revitalization strategy covers all aspects of rural politics, economy, culture, society, and ecology, and is the general leader of the work of the “three rural” issues in the country in the new era. How to combine the rural revitalization strategy with the actuality of rural development, and how to realize the organic connection between the rural revitalization strategy and the rural development path between different regions will be the key to achieving the rural revitalization strategy. This depends not only on theoretical analysis and discussion but also on the basis of the economic development level, regional resource endowment, human capital structure, etc., to build an analysis method and index system for rural revitalization with Chinese characteristics, and to refine the research on rural revitalization paths.

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