

The Logicality of Rural Revitalization Strategy: An Exploration of the Economic Anthropological Perspective

Lin Minxia
Zhejiang Normal University

Dong Liwen
Zhejiang Normal University

The proposal and implementation of China's rural revitalization strategy has its inevitable internal logics. Following the history of development of economic anthropology and using the theories on rural economics, political economics and cultural economics, this paper has analyzed the logics of social ecology, political economics and historical culture of the Chinese rural revitalization strategy. And it has responded to the economic anthropology question of "what is the possibility beyond capitalism" with reference to the logic of China's socialist system. Thus, it provides rich theoretical dialogues and logical arguments for the practice of the rural revitalization strategy. At the same time, the practice of rural revitalization in China also can provide others with Chinese experiences and expressions for economic anthropology, which will expand and enrich the theoretical dimensions and depths of economic anthropology itself.

Keywords: rural revitalization, social-ecological logic, political-economic logic, historical-cultural logic, institutional logic

INTRODUCTION

Rural revitalization is a national development strategy formulated by The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and has its significance in the context of the Chinese socialism's entrance into a new era. On a practical level, the rural areas not only continue to act as a backstop against the risks of urbanization and industrialization but also serve as a foundation for the realization of an ecological development strategy, and an endogenous basis for China's current response to international challenges (Wen, 2021a), a precondition for the realization of a dual international and domestic cycles in China (The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2022). From a logical perspective, China's rural revitalization strategy in the 21st century is endowed with its own socio-ecological, political-economic, historical-cultural, and multiple institutional logical necessities. Scholars from different disciplines have elaborated on and analyzed the logic of promoting the rural revitalization strategy. From the perspective of economic anthropology, scholars can elicit more discussion on the country's achievement of its second stage of rural revitalization, i.e., "by 2020, important progress will be made in rural revitalization, and a basic institutional framework and policy system will be formed" (The CPC

Central Committee and the State Council, 2018a). This will provide a more solid theoretical foundation for a comprehensive realization of rural revitalization in the future.

Economic anthropology has also undergone self-criticism and development. In 1922 Bronislaw Malinowski, through his study of the “kula” trade on the Trobriand Islands presented in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* a world with three fundamental questions of economic anthropology, namely “Can the concepts of the capitalist economy be applied to understanding economic phenomena in non-Western societies?”, “Economy must be understood in the context of non-economic social culture,” and “The focus must be on the perspective of the researchers” (Huang, 2010). Since then, economic anthropology has evolved from “a debate between formalism and substantivism, the gift economics, modernization theory, rural economics, and structural Marx’s theory to political economics, with the most important achievement being highlighting how the economy can be understood in the context of social culture” (Huang, 2010). In these theoretical discussions, economic anthropology has sought to challenge the applicability of the capitalist economy’s concepts and theories, seeking to explore “another possible endeavor beyond the capitalist economy” (Huang, 2010).

The above-mentioned theoretical explorations into economic anthropology have both challenged and transcended the views and theories of predecessors over time, possessing their historical rationality and are of much significance in critically dealing with realistic issues today. An application of the relevant theories of economic anthropology in expounding on China’s rural revitalization strategy help analyze its multiple logics in greater depth. At the same time, the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, as a Chinese experience, also can provide real-life experience for the unfinished aspects of economic anthropology itself, thus coming up with a possible answer to the economic anthropological question: “What is the possibility beyond the capitalist economy?”

Taking into account the chronological development of economic anthropology and applying rural economics, political economics and cultural economics, this paper analyses the logic of social ecology, of political economics, and of the history and culture of the formation of China’s rural revitalization strategy, and uses the logic of China’s socialist system to respond to the question of economic anthropology: “What is the possibility beyond the capitalist economy,” and, at the same time, to clearly show that China’s people-oriented and common prosperity-focused socialism presents the inevitable institutional logic of the rural revitalization strategy.

“RURAL SOCIETY” AND “RURAL ECONOMY”: THE LOGIC OF SOCIAL- ECOLOGY OF RURAL REVITALIZATION

In the 1960s, one of the answers to economic anthropology’s search for “what is the possibility beyond the capitalist economy” was “rural society” and “rural economy” (Redfield, 1960: 23-39). Robert Redfield of the United States put forward the concept of “rural society,” pointing out that the economic form of living in rural areas that depends on agricultural production describes the situation faced by the highest proportion of the world’s population, which widely exists in China, India, South-East Asia, Latin America, the Soviet Union and other regions, and it constitutes part of a “big society,” that is an empire or a urban city. A. V. Chayanov’s study of the peasant economy not only pointed out the widespread existence of the peasant household economy in the world but also argued that “the peasant household economy has its behavioral logic that is different from the capitalist economy” (Chayanov, 1996: 13). In his view, the peasant household economy is based on natural kinship and self-employment, which carries out economic activities to meet the basic needs of the family members, and is characterized by its universality, elasticity, vitality, and stability, as opposed to the wage labor economy of the capitalist economy of socialized mass production. The peasant family is an independent economic form but can be integrated into other economic systems so that it does not need to be dependent on capitalism for its sole existence. After experiencing the globalization process of the capitalist Great Depression, fascism, the two world wars, and the shortcomings of the Soviet Union’s national industrialization mode, the populists like Chayanov, attempted to find a way transcending industrial and urban civilization, with remarkable

positive and dynamic meanings, i.e. having found the small peasant economy as an answer to the possibility beyond the capitalist economy.

China is situated in “three terraced and five climatic zones,” i.e., a geographical environment with many mountains, limited cultivated fields and a diversity of superficial resources, which has led to the formation of irrigated agriculture and of a small-hold economy based on village and community cooperation. This irrigated agriculture has given birth to China’s farming culture and determined the basic characteristics of traditional Chinese society and culture. Therefore, not only has existing classical study on “rural society” or “rural economy” in economic anthropology provided a theoretical premise and basis for China to carry out its “rural revitalization” under its own historical and social conditions, but the historical experience of China’s society and the current rural revitalization can also provide material for the former theory.

Agriculture has long been a major way of life for Chinese people, and the purpose of agricultural labor is to provide peasants with the use value they needed for their own livelihood, rather than an exchange value for the market. The intensive farming of China’s small peasant economy, using a relatively small amount of land to “support one-quarter of the human population” (Anderson, 2003: 1-2), has resulted in China’s development of a series of technology, institutions, ethics, mentality, and concepts to sustain its agricultural mode of production: the invention of sophisticated agricultural tools and techniques; the formation of well-developed water conservation projects to facilitate agricultural production, and then the evolution into the “water politics” (Wang, 1947: 63-65) of governing the country by water conservancy; the economic policy of emphasizing agriculture and suppressing commerce; laws and decrees that reduced and discouraged commerce; the recognition of “farming diligently being the foundation of living” (Ban, 1962: 118), etc. The Chinese ancestors were mythical figures mostly related to agriculture, such as Nuwa and Dayu who prevented floods via water control, Shennong who invented the plows and taught people to farm, and also developed medicine to help cure people, You Chao who made wood into nests, Houji who sowed hundreds of grains, Shujun who started oxen plowing, Leizu who raised silkworms to produce silk, and Wang Hai who created the ox cart, etc. In *The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, it was once asked why the emperor should have a “Sheji (state),” and the answer was: “To seek blessings and reward the people with merit. because ‘no man’s life can be established without land, and no man can eat without grain.’ The land on earth was so vast that it was not possible for people to offer sacrifices to it wholly, therefore land was sealed off one piece from another, and ‘She’ came into being, and ‘She’ was the ‘god of the land’; the grain was so much that it could not be sacrificed to gods all over the country, so the grain was partitioned and then ‘Ji’ came into being as the head of the ‘grain gods’.” (Hu, 1998: 242) This means that the rulers at that time attached importance to the land and grain, believing that the ‘gods’ could bring forth all things and that worshipping them would guarantee a good harvest. The place where the gods of the land and grain were worshipped was called Sheji, which also referred to the state. In other words, China, traditionally speaking, had been a ‘social state’ based on agriculture and a country with a continuous and well-established farming civilization for thousands of years, in which people had lived in small rural communities, relying on water and land, having settled in the land and rendered agriculture into their way of production and life that had been perpetuated until not long ago.

The urban-rural dichotomy formed in China’s history has transformed agriculture from a way of life into the primary industry of the national economy, providing exchange value for the urban industrial production of the secondary industry, and depriving agriculture of its value by using price scissors, thus leaving the rural areas relatively poor and towards marginalization, depletion and hollowing out. What’s more, the crises caused by the cyclical fluctuations in China’s economy during the process of industrialization and urbanization have also been weakened or safely weathered by their being transferred to the rural areas (Wen, 2013: 16). In other words, the rural society has not only existed historically and extensively, but it also effectively made up for the disadvantages of modern industrial mass production and has borne the economic, resource and environmental costs connected with urbanized industrialization.

Just because China has historically been an “agriculture-based society” and, since modern times, agriculture, rural areas and farmers have made contributions, sacrifices to China’s modern development,

and rural areas have served as the backbone in coping with the risks with urbanization and industrialization, therefore, over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, the state has attached great importance to the solution of the rural problems, and has, during 1978-1984, made the adjustment of agricultural operating mechanism as a key issue, and during 1985-2005, explored the path of rural marketization, industrialization and urbanization with Chinese characteristics, and during 2006-2012, promoted the construction of new socialist rural areas (Xie, 2018). The rural revitalization strategy is a continuation of China's efforts to solve the "rural problems" in the new era, meaning that the government will further intervene in the whole process to pay back to rural agriculture and farmers and to maintain the relative stability and modern development of "agriculture, rural areas and farmers." This model of agricultural modernization can also be summarized as the "East Asian model," that is, "due to the high tension between people and land, the only way to maintain the relative stability of 'agriculture, rural areas and farmers' is for the government to intervene in the whole process under the national strategic objectives, and to capitalize social resources via a comprehensive cooperative system with a universal coverage for the rural population" (Wen, 2021b). Therefore, the mechanism of agricultural civilization formed by the traditional Chinese society and the "East Asian model" of agricultural modernization promoted by the government are not only about the "rural areas" and "rural economy," they also try to challenge the "Anglo-American model" of large farm agriculture dominated by the Western capitalist mode of production or the "Rhine model" of small and medium-sized agriculture represented by the European Union.

The traditional Chinese "rural society" and "rural economy" have been naturally linked to ecology and constituted a pro-ecological and pro-humanity rather than pro-capital system, in which it has been emphasized that the land and water of a certain locale feed the people of a certain locale, forming an organic combination of a diversity of nature and that of human society. Small peasant economic production method has been diverse and with its concurrent business side. For example, the Bashu Terraced Fields have been an effective measure to combat soil erosion on sloping land, and the mulberry-based fish ponds in a watery region form an ecological cycle of "mulberry cultivation on a pond base, i.e., mulberry leaves for sericulture—sericulture excrement for fish—fish manure for mulberry fertilization," and so on. Each place has developed its form of agriculture to suit its natural conditions. In addition to "farming diligently," there have also been carpenters and masons, and even primary industries have been formed in the rural areas, which were designated by Fei Xiaotong, a famous Chinese sociologist, as "cottage industry" and "workshop industry" (Fei & Zhang, 1999: 6). In contrast to the Western farming model, where agriculture is developed as an industry, the "rural society" or "rural economy" in China, where agriculture is a way of life and diversified ecological operation, and where farmers are also concurrent business workers, the countryside has a range of career pursuits.

At present, the rural revitalization strategy has put forward the goal of an "ecological living" and the key content of "insisting on a harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature and going on a road of rural green development," which have been closely integrated into China's general ecological developing strategy. The rural areas have vast and diverse natural ecological resources, which are localized resources and have "public" and "non-standard characteristics" (Yang, Luo & Wen, 2020). As Xi Jinping (2020) said, "the mountains, water, forests, fields, lakes, and grass are an organic community of life," "the lifeblood of man is in the fields, the lifeblood of the fields is in the water, the lifeblood of the water is in the mountains, the lifeblood of the mountains is in the soil, and the lifeblood of the soil is in the trees." In contrast, industrialization would strip away the ecological resources of "mountains, water, forests, fields, lakes and grasses," and render them into production materials to meet the requirements of industrialization, thus destroying the "spatial justice" or "ecological justice" in the process of utilization of ecological resources (Jiang & Wen & Shi, 2021). Therefore, the implementation of rural revitalization strategy is a critique of and improvement upon industrialized production, being able to promote the spatial justice of ecological resources. Only through the rural revitalization strategy of ecological development can we realize the "three changes" in reform and turn "resources into assets, capital into shares, and villagers into shareholders" (The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2018b).

Furthermore, since ecological resources are spatial in nature, rural revitalization linked to them should seek to localize development and be oriented towards the overall prosperity of local industries, thus requiring an injection of capital into real industries. This also challenges the tendency of using capital to “de-localize”¹ when capitalism reaches the stage of financial capital and would be one of the most basic and fundamental ways to avoid the resulting crisis within the country and the global crisis too. The ecological environment is localized in nature, and the path of ecological development inevitably requires a reliance on rural areas. In this sense, rural revitalization must emphasize localized development, the real economy and the avoidance of economic bubbles. Localized development of rural revitalization strategies also forms a basis for realizing the micro-level of the general domestic cycle. Therefore, the current practice of rural revitalization in China also provides more empirical scope and explanatory space for the study of “rural society” and “rural economy” in economic anthropology.

“DEPENDENCE” AND “DE-DEPENDENCE”: THE LOGIC OF THE POLITICAL ECONOMICS OF RURAL REVITALIZATION

From the late 1960s to 1980s, in the face of the inequality and underdevelopment brought about by the global expansion of Western capitalism, economic anthropologists, drawing on Marx’s theory of political economics, developed analyses and critiques of capitalist expansion. Andre G. Frank came up with the dependency theory based on Latin America, which was deeply hurt by the global expansion of Western capitalism, and pointed out that the dependency of less developed countries and regions on developed countries and regions caused the persistent poverty and underdevelopment of the former. This dependency is a “metropolitan-satellite city” (Frank, 2015) type of unequal structural relationship, which makes the latter suffer from the double exploitation of the former and cannot obtain their sustainable development. Immanuel Wallerstein broke away from Frank’s dependency theory and proposed a “core-semi-periphery-periphery” (Wallerstein, 1998: 194) capitalist world economic system. In his view, in the capitalist world economic system since the 16th century the core capitalist countries had exploited other frontier countries and zones through the semi-periphery countries and zones, and, along with the expansion of this capitalist system, different parts of the world were continuously wrapped into the system. Eric R. Wolf’s *Europe and the People without History* has been described as an “anthropological political economics” (Huang, 2010). Just as political economics itself always tends to recognize the power of capitalism, this anthropological political economic theory further argues how capitalism uses capitalist modes of production and market exchange mechanisms to integrate non-capitalist societies into its own system. And capitalist economic expansion has dominated not only the economy but also society and culture, with societies concerned no longer being relatively static and cold ones with boundaries, and culture no longer being the essence of a society but being continuously mobile and reconfigured (Wolf, 2006: 7-25).

Thus, the many serious dilemmas currently facing many countries in the Eastern and Southern hemispheres are not local, but institutional and structural ones within a worldwide system of West-East, and North-South, with the institutional consequences of the modern global capitalist system. “Ignoring the institutional roots and consequences of these dilemmas is, at best, attempting an ineffective solution; otherwise it is dangerous and misleading.” (Arrighi, 2000: 24) Arrighi has pointed out that industrialization is not the same as development, it is only a means of pursuing wealth. “Whether industrialization means ‘development’ all depends on its ability to serve as an effective means of pursuing wealth.” (Arrighi, 2000) The rich Western countries after World War II achieved their wealth by transferring their industries to non-Western societies such as in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, that is, by “de-industrialization” to achieve their wealth. The non-Western countries that have been industrialized by the transfer of Western industries have not been able to catch up with the wealth standards of the developed ones, despite the numerous human and ecological costs. Thus this is a structural and institutional dilemma.

The “dependency theory” and the “core-semi periphery-periphery” world system of political economics is strongly critical of its impoverishment and deprivation due to its incorporation into capitalist

development, and even Immanuel Wallerstein argued that the capitalist system fell into chaos and ended up in a phase of structural crisis (Wallerstein, *et al*, 2014: 9-30), but, in spite of this, the theory is incapable of giving a path and direction to an escape from this structure at the level of South American reality. For Eric R. Wolf (2006: 451-453), *Europe and the People without History*, while attempting to break with Eurocentrism, seems to fall into another centralist discourse in which all places and cultures will be included in the globalization process of capitalism as if declaring that there is no other historical path. In other words, they do not provide a realistic case as a “bargaining chip” against the global polarization and inequality caused by the capitalist globalization process.

China, on the contrary, in the 1960s, due to the blockade by the United States and the Soviet Union, passively experienced a period of “de-dependence,” and one of the reasons for the success of that was that China had vast agricultural and rural areas (Dong & Wen, 2019: 12). China’s development policy of “hard struggle and self-reliance” and the extraction of surpluses from its rural agricultural production to achieve an accumulation of capital for industrialization and development were realized in this context of “de-dependence.” Compared to the capitalist process in Western countries, China neither realized capital accumulation via foreign plunder and slave trade, nor formed a pattern of “dependence” on other countries and regions through capital and industrial export for a continuous exploitation. The famous Egyptian economist Samir Amin proposed a strategy of “decoupling” for the peripheral countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in response to the further development of capitalist globalization, arguing that it is not a form of seclusion or cultural conservatism, but a strategy that “aims to subordinate the relationship between the peripheral countries and the central countries to the logic and requirements of internal development” and is linked to the “program of building a national, modern, and self-centered country” (Barry, *et al*, 1998). At the same time, Samir Amin pointed out that “decoupling” depends on the conditions and regionalization of the peripheral countries, which include “the negotiating power and bargaining power of the peripheral countries, the economic, cultural and political advantages they possess, and the degree of weakness or strength of the peripheral countries” (Barry, *et al*, 1998). He affirmed that China had made it in this respect.

It should be said that this historical experience of China is an important complement to the research of political economics in economic anthropology. Today, when the challenges of capitalist globalization are further intensified and the Western countries led by the United States are resuming a cold war mentality and imposing sanctions and blockades on China, the rural revitalization strategy can be said to be a one that emphasizes national independence and autonomy in the sense of Samir Amin, helping China to achieve “internal circulation,” strengthening the national economic and national fundamentals, so as to improve its external negotiating power and achieve “de-dependent” social development.

The possible combination of historical, cultural, institutional, and geographic factors in China has endowed it with the ability to respond to the financial capital war waged by the West with its own national system. China’s rural revitalization strategy provides conditions for “de-dependence” at the realistic level, thus breaking through the dilemma of the political economics school that proposes that inequality is due to a structural dependence but can do nothing about it, and also questioning the absolute dominant power of the capitalist world system. Therefore, this strategy has profound connotations at the level of political economics, and also make new insights and possible new fields as a direction of political research for economic anthropology.

“CULTURE IS AS ECONOMY”: THE LOGIC OF HISTORY AND CULTURE OF RURAL REVITALIZATION

In response to political economics’ emphasis on the dominant power of the capitalist world system, a perspective emphasizing the power of local culture has emerged in economic anthropology since the 1980s. The promotion of cultural symbolism has its origins in Mauss’s theory of social symbolism. In the opening chapter of his *The Gift*, Mauss revealed a relationship between ideas and facts (Mauss, 2002: 1-5), and through a systematic research of the gift, he showed that ideas are the essence of phenomena and a basis for understanding the reality. Specifically, in the economic sphere, it is “through an understanding

of 'local culture' that the meaning of 'economy' in the minds of local people can be understood, just as produced goods must be symbolized through a process of culture before they become valuable" (Huang, 2010). Sahlins more explicitly pointed out that capitalism enters places through local universalist views and worldviews (Sahlins, 2003: 363-365). Michael Taussig studied the attitudes of farmers in Cauca, Colombia toward the money they received for their work on large farms, and the shift in Bolivian tin miners' perceptions of the ore god Tio from a good to an evil god after the entry of capitalism (Taussig, 1980: 292-232). This study also made it clear that capitalism is explained and understood through the cultural beliefs of the local society. What's more, Stephen Gudeman directly saw Western economics as a local knowledge of Western society and pointed out that each culture constructs its mode of life, which had its key symbols or "focal metaphor" (Gudeman, 1986: 88-194), and only by the latter could economy be understood. These perspectives are summarized in the perspective of "cultural economy," which is a cultural approach to economic phenomena, and this cultural perspective at least provides a theoretical basis for the different models of capitalism that have emerged from the expansion of capitalism.

One of the goals of China's rural revitalization is to "civilize the rural areas," and the corresponding strategic contents at least include "to inherit, develop and enhance the farming civilization, and take the road of rural cultural prosperity" and "to innovate the rural governance system, and take the road of rural good governance." To achieve "rural revitalization," it is necessary to re-examine the value and meaning of farming and the rural areas as a form of life, not only in terms of economic development (Hu & Lin, 2022). From the perspective of the "cultural economics" of economic anthropology, such strategic objectives should cover a re-affirmation of the meaning of "local culture" that has been destroyed and sacrificed in the process of China's modernization, thus prompting people to further explore how traditional Chinese rural culture has constructed its life pattern, to recognize economic activities by incorporating them into cultural symbols and metaphors, and to reframe the economic mindset of the cultural instrumentalism once advocated by the idea that "culture setting the stage and economy starting to sing."

In the process of the modernization involved in the urban-rural binary opposition, farmers in rural areas or urban areas have been passively subjected to the modernizing practices economically, psychologically and culturally. The traditional culture, which once provided values and psychological affiliation for millions of farmers in rural areas, has been washed away under the tide of modernization and consumerism. In addition to the decline in the rural population brought about by the population flow in urbanization, dregs such as money worshipping, gambling, pornography and even drug addiction have also been growing in rural areas, polluting and nibbling at the rural society. Therefore, in the construction of the new rural areas, the government, scholars, new country squires or gentry, and even the villagers themselves should realize that true rural revitalization is not simply on an economic or material level, but on a spiritual restoration or construction of local cultural identity, and a reconstruction of the local culture that was once the value of individual life, the soul of rural society, and that allowed economic activities to be meaningful.

The traditional Chinese economy has been a "statecraft emphasizing" economy, being inconsistent with the "economy" of the profit maximization pursued by a modern capitalist society. The intellectuals and new country gentry, with the way of regarding "filial piety as the root, ecology as the foundation, cooperation as the rule, and culture as the soul," are bringing back the old "culture" in the new rural construction, recognizing that a place without culture is not sustainable in the process of rural construction. The so-called economic activities serve essentially as a means, but the real one is the that of emphasizing statecraft, a style of life that people can be proud of and that can reproduce a civilized life. In other words, culture is the goal and the root of the economy. If culture is rotten, the economy will sooner or later go astray.²

Chinese rural tradition has been an ethical culture based upon kinship and farming, so agriculture is a way of life for small rural communities rather than an industry, and is a culture and even an institution formed for the life and survival of the families and communities. Ancestral shrines were established to perpetuate the clan culture, and clan fields and school-supportive fields were established to ensure the public expenses of families, including temples and clan schools, thus leading to the tradition of "land

cultivation and book reading” to maintain the moral and ethical character, and maintain the family’s prosperity. It is manifested in what anthropologists call “showing filial piety, emphasizing the relatives, valuing the people, and upholding morality” (Chen, 1996: 7), which focuses on the affinity and interdependence of clan members, as well as their responsibility and obligation to the family. Therefore, economic activities should be to achieve family harmony, healthy reproduction, and happy growth of future generations, so it is necessary to “economize,” to form a friendly relationship with the natural ecology, and to realize the meaning and success of life.

With the promotion of national new rural construction and revitalization, the villagers’ sense of cultural subjectivity and consciousness begins to awaken, and they actively recover their own local traditional culture and find in it the spiritual energy that previously belonged to the “village community.” For example, through the practice of intangible cultural heritage, traditional activities such as lion and dragon dances, team drumming and fire-making have been restored, and the organizational activities and life of the village community restored too. Collective activities have increased, a greater sense of belonging to the village community emerged, and the spirit of mutual assistance among villagers improved (Huang, 2017: 339-341). Many of the young people who returned to their hometowns to start their own businesses, “choosing to live their lives under the role of traditional ‘family ethics,’ and a pursuit of a harmonious family lifestyle constitutes their common goal of return. The pursuit of monetary income maximization in the form of entrepreneurship is a symptomatic purpose of the youth returning to the rural areas too, and its true significance lies in the strategy of obtaining income maximization via entrepreneurship, which in turn leads to ‘living a good life’ centered on ‘family orientation’” (Lin, 2019).

Thus, “culture setting the stage and economy starting to sing” is an economic way of thinking dominated by the logic of capital, which makes everything tradable and profitable. But the study of cultural economics ultimately treats such Western capitalist concepts and theories of the market economy as a “local knowledge” rather than as the only universally applicable standard. It can be seen that in China’s new rural construction, some country squires have consciously criticized the former view of market economy by practicing local culture again in their local society, and have regained the indigenous “local knowledge,” that is, the economy of the human being that “emphasizes statecraft.” Culture makes people think about what kind of human being they are, which is their fundamental purpose, and the economy is the accompanying means to achieve this purpose. Economics, in this sense, is a study of human nature. On this level, the seemingly extreme statement “there is no economics, only metaphor” (Gudeman, 1986) presents a positive critique of and reflection on the Western capitalist economy.

“WHAT IS THE POSSIBILITY BEYOND CAPITALISM”: THE INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC OF RURAL REVITALIZATION

Economic anthropology has been challenging and deconstructing the logic and discourse system of modern Western capitalist development in terms of the various economic and cultural forms existing in the non-Western world and exploring what is the possibility beyond the modern Western capitalist economy. On the other hand, from a historical perspective, capitalism in its globalized expansion has also fallen into its internal contradictions and historical paradoxes, thus having to face the problem of its developmental transformation. In this sense, the implementation of China’s rural revitalization strategy is, on the one hand, a ballast to meet the challenges of globalization dominated by the West countries, and, on the other, an exploration of the institutional logic of the transformation of capitalist development, and a deeper answer to the economic anthropological question of “what is the possibility beyond the capitalist economy.”

More than 150 years ago, Karl Marx predicted a global expansion of capitalism in his *Das Kapital*. Since the birth of capitalism, discussions about it have never stopped. Generally speaking, some of most basic characteristics of capitalism include: economically, it is manifested as private ownership of property, free market, and capital’s goal of obtaining surplus value and pursuing maximum profit; politically, it is manifested as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the democratic political system of

capitalism. Geoffrey Hodgson of England also argued for the idea of the state and law as an important and even central basis of capitalism (Hodgson, 2019: 1-14).

There is no doubt that capital is the central issue of capitalism. In terms of the accumulation and acquisition of capital, capitalism goes through commercial capitalism (overseas trade plundering), industrial capitalism and financial capitalism. Of them, the second stage of industrialization made capitalism a social system and a historical era. After the end of World War II, the U.S.-led Western countries gradually prompted capitalism to enter the stage of financial capitalism through industrial transfer and dollar currency settlement, and the globalization process of capitalism was further accelerated. These three stages of development of capitalism also corresponded to the three stages of the global expansion of capitalism, namely, “the pre-capitalist period of colonization, the period of industrial capital competition, and the period of financial capital expansion formed by the outward shift of industries from Western countries to the financial capital stage since the 1970s” (Wen & Zhang, 2020).

The means of pursuing capital appreciation and the contradictions arising from different stages of capitalism have also been manifested in different ways. The overseas colonial stage, with naked wealth plundering and the slave trade as the major means, mainly manifested itself in the confrontation and contradiction between capitalist colonizers and the aboriginal colonized. In the industrial capital stage, capitalism exploited the surplus value of labor through onshore industrialized production to achieve capital accumulation and monopoly, while also erupting into the endogenous contradictions of industrial capitalism, that is, overproduction, which consequently, triggered two world wars. In the industrial capital stage, the exploitation pattern of the global capitalist system manifested itself in the dual exploitation of non-Western societies as a market for raw materials and for commodities. The stage of financial capital that emerged after the Second World War involved global exploitation using the U.S. dollar as the global financial settlement currency.

In the stage of financial capitalism, the globalization of the economy seems to provide new space for the development of capitalism, but the development of the former has also plunged Western capitalism itself into a more comprehensive and systematic dilemma: the inflation brought about by the increase of money issuance, the increased tendency of capital to the virtual sphere, has led to the virtualization and bubble of the economy, and the shrinking of the real economy, which in turn affects all aspects of life. Thus, an increased polarization arose between the rich and poor, sharpening class antagonisms, increasing ethnic divisions, social cleavages, more serious cultural conflicts and more prominent global ecological problems. Even the vast world of Asia, Africa and Latin America, on the periphery of Western finance capital, has not only failed to achieve sustained progress and development but has been plunged into constant poverty and chaos. As Sidney Webb argued, capitalism has the obvious “four disadvantages,” namely the poverty of the poor, income inequality, disparities in individual freedom, and the ultimate failure in the pursuit of national wealth. Capitalism has developed to the point where it has become “an enemy of national morality and international peace, and indeed of civilization itself, based entirely on the motives of its possessor’s pecuniary predation” (Webb, 2001: 6).

Capitalism has its inherent insoluble contradictions, both from the perspective of Karl Marx’s capitalist production and of the free market exchange. The COVID-19 outbreak that began in early 2020 and spread globally has caused the aforementioned inherent contradictions of contemporary capitalism to erupt in an even more intense manner. Karl Polanyi pointed out that it was the globalized economy based on market liberalism pursued by capitalism that led to the Great Depression and even the collapse of the capitalist economy, and further led to the rise of fascism, and that free marketism and fascism are what he called the two “great transformations” of human history (Polanyi, 2007: 1-8). Today, the whole of human society is once again facing its greatest change ever seen in 300 years: the decline of capitalism and the transformation of its social form. This change is an external manifestation of the weakening of globalization supported by the dollar financial system, and it may be a “Great Transformation” of human history again. Likewise, the deeper reason for this transformation is that capitalism has developed to the stage of financial capitalism, and the pursuit of capital profit using finance has itself led to this. The development of capitalism has since forced itself to seek possibilities “beyond the capitalist economy”; otherwise it might be unsustainable.

In contrast, Western economic anthropology began to search for this answer in the 1930s and 1940s, but, on the one hand, the existing research has not fully caught up with the profound crisis and the “great transformation” caused by the development of financial capitalism, and, on the other hand, due to ideological reasons, the empirical research on China is still relatively absent. In China, anthropologists, represented by Fei Xiaotong, have been working to find the answer to this question of economic anthropology in China since the publication of Fei’s *Peasant life in China* in the late 1930s. However, since the primary national reality and task at that time was how to drive the country’s development through increased urbanization and industrialization, and although the older generation of anthropologists recognized that urbanization and industrialization had deprived rural societies, their research remained for a long time with an active pursuit of urbanization and modernization of Chinese villages as the goal and had not yet dealt with the ecological transformation in depth.

Therefore, the economic anthropological question of “what is the possibility beyond the capitalist economy” is a question that the above-mentioned globalization process of capitalism and the various economic, social, political, and ecological problems have brought about, which essentially touches on the exploration of the future developing direction and institutional transformation of capitalism. The Communist Party of China and the socialist construction with Chinese characteristics under its leadership, in its social, political and economic goals and concepts, have been trying to find a fairer and more just path of future development in this global capitalist process, a possibility beyond the development of the capitalist social form. The ecological development strategy based on rural revitalization is precisely a way to cope with the problems brought about by the development of modern industrialization and the process of financial capitalism. The institutional system that goes with it is the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, which serves as the institutional logic for carrying out the rural revitalization strategy in China today.

It is common to trace the history of socialism back to the utopian socialism in Thomas More’s *Utopia* of the early 16th century. In the 18th century, through the development of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen, utopian socialism reached its peak and provided an ideological basis for Marx and Engels to create scientific socialism. Whether it be utopian or scientific socialism, its core lies in the establishment of a republican, communal, shared society in which all people are equal and free from exploitation. This idea can also be reflected in the traditional Chinese society’s “Datong ideal”³, as described in the *Classic of Rites* and also Mencius’ “people-oriented” (Mencius, 2007: 324) thought.

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Communist Party established a socialist state based on the public ownership of the means of production, and accumulated experience in the process of building and developing a socialist state. Deng Xiaoping summarized the essence of socialism as “liberating and developing the productive forces, eliminating exploitation and polarization, and ultimately achieving common prosperity,” which includes methods, paths, and goals. In the process of liberating and developing productive forces, China has transformed from a planned economy to a socialist market economy, enabling the Chinese economy to have grown significantly. However, the socialist market economy is not exempt from the objective laws of the market economy: structural or cyclical overproduction, the tendency of capital to financial and speculative activities in search of quick returns, and the related problems of widening gap between the rich and the poor, urban-rural and regional developing imbalance and other issues.

However, unlike Western capitalist countries, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics can tackle or regulate the above-mentioned inevitable problems in the operation of the market economy via the system itself, including the nationwide infrastructure construction by the state (state-owned enterprises) and economic growth driven by investment, the top-down Party members taking the lead in poverty alleviation projects and achieving remarkable results, the supervision and control over financial over-expansion, the implementation of fiscal reform, the continuous promotion of “agriculture, rural areas and farmers” projects, and so on. All these measures and actions are aimed at realizing the rightful meaning of a socialist state: to lead the people of this land to common prosperity through legitimate labor. Achieving common prosperity is the goal of the scientific socialism, and, as some scholars have outlined, “achieving shared development, practicing shared justice and shared governance” is “the political vision

of the Communist Party of China and the essential requirement of socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Wang & Tang, 2019).

History proves that neither “eating from the same big pot” nor poverty is socialism, which does not exclude markets, capital, or a recognition of the legitimate income of individual labor. On the contrary, markets, capital, and recognition of the income of individual labor are important means to achieve socialism. Marx once pointed out, “Capitalist production, by the necessity of natural processes, result in a negation of itself, which is a negation of the negation. This negation is not the re-establishment of private ownership, but the re-establishment of individual ownership based on the achievements of the capitalist epoch, i.e., the re-establishment of individual ownership based on collaboration and the common appropriation of the land and means of production produced by labor itself” (Marx & Engels, 1972: 834). In other words, socialism is based on the development of capitalism; therefore, the market economy itself is not undesirable, nor is business itself. What is undesirable is the formation of monopoly and exploitation using market and business, which makes society lose its sense of justice and fairness. What socialism with Chinese characteristics wants to oppose is an ultra-liberal market, the monopoly of wealth by a few, and the trampling of social justice and rights by capital. In this sense, socialism is a possibility beyond capitalism. The rural revitalization strategy is an integral part of the exploration and system of this possibility, because “feeding” the peasants and the rural areas means defending the interests and rights of the masses and people, who constitute the majority of the society and is a requirement of the logic of the socialist system.

CONCLUSION

Economic anthropology has been challenging and deconstructing the nature, development logic and discourse system of the modern Western capitalist economy in terms of the various economic and cultural forms that exist in the non-Western world, exploring the possibility beyond modern Western capitalism and offering various possible answers and explanations, which, however, are lacking the Chinese experience. China’s modernization process, from “learning from the advanced technologies in the West to resist the invasion of the western powers” to building a socialist market economy, has experienced a break with its history and traditions and dealing with the various dilemmas brought about by the development of modernization; in the 21st century, China is faced with the double dilemma of endogenous contradictions and external pressures of the market economy. The proposal and implementation of the rural revitalization strategy is not only a national strategy to cope with the double dilemma but also an important force to challenge and deconstruct the development logic and discourse of modern western capitalism with China’s history, culture and system. The proposal and practice of China’s rural revitalization strategy have the necessity and rationality in terms of the logic of social ecology, political economics, history and culture, and institutions. Using the theories of rural, political and cultural economics of economic anthropology to analyze and elaborate the above logic provides a richer theoretical dialogue and logical argument for the practice of China’s rural revitalization strategy. At the same time, China’s rural revitalization practice can also respond to and challenge the limitations of the original economic anthropology in terms of political economics and cultural economics, and use the Chinese experience and expression in response to the question of “what is the possibility beyond the capitalist economy,” thus expanding and enriching the theoretical direction and depth of economic anthropology itself.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ That is, social development in the financial capital stage usually follows the logic of capital dominance. Under this logic, “the accumulation of market capital in the city organizes rural land, labor and money to the city, and the capital logic goes down to the countryside to dominate rural development, resulting in an external dependence of the countryside, which cannot lead to rural revitalization.” See Zhao, Lina & Ma,

- Tao (2018): Where does rural revitalization come from and where does it go? --- Reflections based on the capital logic and the creation of a good life, *Journal of Seeking Truth*, 18(04), 1-9.
2. The author summarizes the speech given by, He Huili at the 2020 Guoren Rural Construction Online Forum, entitled “Intellectuals’ hairs should be inserted into the organic dung heap of social development.” See He Huili & Liu Kun & Xu Zhenzhen (2021): Hongnong Experiment: Promoting Rural Revitalization by Restoring Local Culture, *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 21(06), 110-124.
 3. “What will it be like in the ideal society? The state is fair to all people so that people of high moral character and ability will be chosen, and honesty will be practiced by all, and harmony will be cultivated. Therefore, people should not only support their parents and raise their children, so that the elderly may live out their days, the middle-aged may serve the community and the young may grow up well, and so that the old men without wives, the old women without husbands, the children who lost their father when, the old men without sons, and the disabled may be provided for. Men should have occupations, and women should be married on time. People abhor the abandonment of possessions on the ground and store them, but not for the sole enjoyment of them, and abhor the refusal to do one’s best in common labor, and always labor not for personal gain. In this way, there will be no theft, no rebellion, no harm to people and no need to close the doors of every household, and this is called the ideal society.” See Lv, Youren & Lv, Yongmei Translated and Annotated (1998): *The Complete Translation of the Book of Rites and the Complete Translation of the Book of Filial Piety*, Volume I and II, Guiyang: Guizhou People’s Publishing House, 420.

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