Educational Innovation Research, 2026, Volume 4, Issue 7
https://bbwpublisher.com/journal/EIR
Online ISSN: 3029-1852
Print ISSN: 3029-1844

Research on the Participation of Social Organizations in Rural Revitalization Strategy in Shanxi Province

Xu Yin, Xin Wang

Shanxi New Era Research Institute for the Cause and Industry of Aging, Taiyuan, Shanxi 030000, China

Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

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Abstract: The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed the comprehensive implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, making the development of agriculture, rural areas and farmers (the Three-Rural Issues) the top priority of modernization construction in the new era. Within the multi-party rural governance system, social organizations leverage their strengths in public welfare, professionalism and flexibility to fill the supply gaps left by the government and the market. They play a prominent role in industrial revitalization, public service delivery, rural governance and cultural inheritance, and have become an indispensable social force for rural revitalization. Taking the practical practices of social organizations involved in rural revitalization in Shanxi Province as the research object, this paper adopts literature review, case analysis and logical induction. It systematically sorts out the practical achievements of such participation and analyzes prominent challenges, including imbalanced regional development, insufficient project sustainability, and shortages of professional talent. Drawing on typical local practices in Shanxi, this paper puts forward optimization approaches for policy implementation, talent development, and digital upgrading. It aims to foster more standardized, sustainable and efficient engagement of social organizations in rural revitalization, and offer references for the modernization of regional rural governance.

Keywords: Social organizations; Rural revitalization; Multi-party governance; Rural construction in Shanxi

Online publication: July 26, 2026

1. Review of research status and research significance

1.1. Review of research status

In the implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, the government, the market and social forces constitute three core stakeholders. As key vehicles for social participation, social organizations deliver unique governance value in resource integration, grassroots service provision, entity cultivation and interest coordination. Domestic academic circles have carried out extensive studies on social organizations'

participation in rural revitalization, which can be grouped into three categories: functional-value studies, dilemma studies and participation-path studies.

From the perspective of functional value, Jia Shuangyue (2018) noted that social organizations possess inherent public-welfare attributes. They can compensate for insufficient grassroots public-service resources and continuously channel social resources toward rural development [1]. Zhang Zhaoxin and Wu Tianlong (2019) argued that rural social organizations feature voluntariness, mutual-aid orientation and non-profit characteristics, serving as important support for constructing a modern rural governance system [2]. Xu Tanquan et al. (2019) held that social organizations can act as intermediaries among the government, market actors and villagers. They help optimize the rural cultural governance system and build a sound environment for rural development [3].

In terms of practical dilemmas, most scholars point to common drawbacks including ambiguous positioning, low governance efficiency, deficient incentive mechanisms and incomplete institutional safeguards. Gong Zhiwei (2020) identified three shortcomings for social organizations engaged in public-service provision: lagging legal construction, unsatisfactory institutional docking and inadequate professional competence [4]. Yu Jianhui (2020) indicated that limited participation enthusiasm, irregular operations and weak self-regulation mechanisms among social organizations constrain their practical effectiveness [5].

Regarding participation paths, Xiao Ziyang (2020) summarized grassroots engagement practices of social organizations through research on left-behind villages [6]. From an embeddedness perspective, Yin Yao (2022) suggested that social organizations must rely on local authorities, couple with grassroots entities and respond to residents' real demands so as to deliver effective village-level services [7]. Based on comparative case studies, Zhu Jiangang et al. (2023) proposed breaking the constraints of traditional participatory-development frameworks and building new participation models adapted to rural contexts [8]. Cheng Hui (2024) and Zhang Yunxi (2024), drawing on collaborative-governance and new endogenous-development theories, emphasized the importance of farmer autonomy, local demands and strategic alignment [9,10]. Through empirical research, Wang Yu (2025) found that technology-oriented social organizations face a structural contradiction: strong willingness to participate paired with weak organizational capacity [11].

Overall, existing literature is fruitful yet still has gaps. First, most studies focus on macro theories with limited regional pertinence; few systematic investigations target Shanxi Province specifically. Second, many studies rely heavily on single-case analysis, lacking regional comparison and pattern generalization. Third, existing works prioritize outcome analysis while neglecting process mechanisms; there is insufficient exploration of sustainable development paths for locally rooted organizations. Accordingly, examining Shanxi-based cases, summarizing region-specific models and proposing context-adapted development paths carries solid research value.

1.2. Research significance

1.2.1. Theoretical significance

Rooted in Shanxi's regional features, this paper explores mechanisms, dilemmas and paths for social organizations' participation in rural revitalization. It enriches research on rural social governance for less-developed provinces in central China. Applying collaborative-governance and new endogenous-development theories, it analyzes the differentiated functions of social organizations across the "five major revitalization" dimensions. This fills gaps left by prior research's insufficient regional focus and

provides theoretical references for peer regions.

1.2.2. Practical significance

First, it relieves supply-demand mismatches and optimizes resource allocation. Social organizations can take over public-service functions devolved by the government, cover remote rural areas and vulnerable sectors, fill gaps left by market services, and precisely satisfy demands such as education for left-behind children, elderly care and industrial-technical assistance.

Second, it unlocks rural endogenous driving forces. Through skill training, grassroots-organization cultivation and industrial empowerment, the traditional "transfusion-style" assistance model can be transformed. Long-term mechanisms can be established for farmer self-development and local organizational self-operation.

Third, it improves the diversified rural governance system. Acting as bridges, social organizations coordinate relations among governments, enterprises and residents. They participate in formulating village rules and folk-custom governance, rebuild rural social capital and mitigate governance challenges caused by rural hollowing-out.

Fourth, it preserves local culture and narrows the urban-rural divide. By revitalizing intangible cultural heritage, inheriting folk customs and protecting local cultural resources, social organizations reaffirm rural values, encourage return-migrant entrepreneurship and contribute to common-prosperity advancement.

2. Research contents, approaches and key points

2.1. Main research contents

This paper covers three core parts. First, it reviews fields, approaches, achievements and existing problems for Shanxi social organizations participating in rural revitalization. Second, through typical local cases, it analyzes practical models including industrial empowerment, employment support, cultural revitalization and brand building. Third, given Shanxi's current conditions, it constructs long-term development paths for such participation from policy, talent, industry and digital dimensions.

2.2. Research approach

This paper follows the research logic: status review-strength-and-weakness analysis-case study-problem attribution-path optimization. It first sorts out the overall status of Shanxi social organizations' engagement in rural revitalization. Next, it summarizes strengths in policy support, localization and industrial models alongside drawbacks of regional imbalance, poor sustainability and talent shortages. Then practical experience is distilled from two typical cases: women-oriented industrial revitalization and the yellow-flower industry in Datong. Finally, targeted optimization paths are put forward.

2.3. Research key points

2.3.1. Research focus

The research focuses on analyzing participation mechanisms of social organizations in industrial revitalization, public services and cultural revitalization; summarizing industrial-support models for local special-products; and exploring long-run operating mechanisms for collaborative governance and pluralistic co-governance.

2.3.2. Research difficulties

First, grassroots social-organization data are scarce and statistical standards are inconsistent, hindering empirical analysis. Second, grassroots practice features government dominance and passive organizational participation, creating complex multi-interest coordination challenges. Third, although top-level policies are relatively complete, grassroots implementation barriers persist and cannot be fully eliminated.

3. Cases and analysis of social organizations' participation in rural revitalization in Shanxi province

3.1. Forge ahead in the new era, women strive for achievements

Shanxi Women and Children Development Foundation was approved and established by the provincial civil-affairs department in 2013. Supervised by the Shanxi Women's Federation, it is a provincial-level public-welfare institution serving women and children. As a provincial social organization, it has advanced rural women's revitalization via multiple initiatives by drawing on Shanxi's unique agricultural resources. It provides systematic support for industry cultivation, women's employment, intangible-cultural-heritage revitalization and e-commerce empowerment, and has thus developed a distinctive rural women-oriented revitalization model.

3.1.1. Empowering specialized industries to boost household incomes

Yujiahao Silk Industry in Yangcheng County adopts the "enterprise-cooperative-farmer" model. Supported by the Foundation's platform resources, standardized mulberry gardens and sericulture systems have been built, and intelligent purchasing equipment has been introduced to stabilize cocoon quality and market prices. This project has raised incomes for more than 30,000 local farmers and secured stable jobs for 200 rural women. Female workers earn an annual income ranging from 25,000 to 36,000 yuan on average, while households engaged in home-based silkworm farming gain roughly 13,000 yuan in additional annual income. Meanwhile, it fosters cottage industries, rural homestays and women-led domestic-service businesses, enabling local women to secure jobs and increase earnings near home.

3.1.2. Building E-commerce competencies to expand employment channels

Cooperating with the Kuaishou platform and women's federations at municipal and provincial levels, the Foundation launched the "Her Power: Rural Revitalization Support Program". E-commerce training sessions were delivered in Linfen, Yuncheng, Changzhi, Yangquan and other locations, training 400 rural women in total. Adopting a four-tier system: inclusive basic training, key-talent incubation, support for female entrepreneurs and grassroots-cadre training, the project cultivates rural live-streaming and short-video operators. It facilitates online sales of agricultural goods and continuously fuels new-type rural-industry growth.

3.1.3. Revitalizing intangible-cultural-heritage industries to reconstruct rural economy

Centered on Huozhou New-Year steamed buns (Nianmo), a distinctive intangible-cultural-heritage product, the Foundation cooperated with women's federations at all levels to deliver systematic training for women, reaching 3,000 trainees. Through expert technical guidance, product innovation, flower-cake competitions and e-commerce live-streaming, traditional handmade snacks have been developed into a regional

characteristic industry. Women's activity hubs, industrial demonstration bases and village-level women's groups have been set up to form a complete industrial-service system. This has delivered stable employment for 10,000 women and advanced deep integration between intangible cultural heritage and rural industries.

3.2. Empowering industry associations for high-quality specialized-agriculture development

Datong City is known as "China's Capital of Yellow-Flower", with a stable planting area of 260,000 mu. Yellow-flower constitutes a pillar local specialty-crop. Leveraging its strengths in resource linkage, brand promotion and industrial integration, the Datong Catering and Hotel Industry Association supports transformation and upgrading for the yellow-flower sector.

The association builds enterprise docking platforms. It promotes freeze-dried yellow-flower powder into catering supply chains and develops processed goods including yellow-flower sauce, pickled yellow-flower, yellow-flower facial masks and yellow-flower pre-cooked dishes to extend industrial chains. By setting standards for yellow-flower dishes, hosting food contests and popularizing yellow-flower dishes at wedding banquets, it pushes yellow-flower products toward standardization, branding and market-orientation. It effectively raises market recognition and the added-value of Datong yellow-flower, realizing quality improvement and income growth for farmers.

4. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of social organizations' participation in Shanxi rural revitalization

4.1. Development strengths

4.1.1. Sound policy and institutional safeguards

Shanxi Province has promulgated the "Shanxi Rural Revitalization Promotion Regulations." It clarifies the legal standing of social organizations participating in rural revitalization and incorporates their rural-revitalization performance into annual assessment indicators for social organizations. Civil-affairs authorities have rolled out the special action "Pursuing Momentum, Strengthening Village Development, and Promoting Inheritance" and built a project supply-demand docking platform. These deliver institutional backing and policy channels for organizational participation.

4.1.2. Mature local industry-support models

Drawing on local resource endowments, Shanxi social organizations have formed an integrated "industry + culture + technology" assistance model. Women-focused organizations prioritize specialized handicrafts and intangible-cultural-heritage industries; industry associations drive upgrading for specialty agriculture; public-welfare organizations deliver grassroots public-service support. Replicable local revitalization cases have emerged, such as Huozhou New-Year steamed buns, Datong yellow-flower and Yangcheng sericulture.

4.1.3. High Integration of Localization and Specialization

Local social organizations are familiar with local conditions and customs. They can accurately match real-world rural demands and avoid the "mismatch" risks common for external assistance. Meanwhile, drawing on industrial, expert, and platform resources, they provide specialized technical, training, and brand-operation services, achieving local adaptation alongside professional empowerment.

4.2. Development weaknesses

4.2.1. Noticeable imbalance in regional development

Benefiting from industrial foundations and policy advantages, social organizations in Taiyuan and Jinzhong are highly active with large project investment and concentrated resources. By contrast, Lüliang, Xinzhou and remote mountainous northern-Shanxi areas host few social organizations with limited coverage and weak resource-integration capacity. Obvious regional gaps in assistance constrain balanced rural-revitalization progress province-wide.

4.2.2. Insufficient project self-sustainability

Most projects run by social organizations depend on government subsidies and short-term social donations, showing weak self-sustainability. Some follow popular trends with highly homogeneous designs and lack long-term operation planning, resulting in the frequent problem: assistance terminates once project funding expires.

4.2.3. Shortfalls in professional-talent reserves

Practitioners in social organizations receive low salaries, have limited career-advancement prospects and low professional identity, leading to high staff turnover. Grassroots entities lack compound talents equipped with rural contextual knowledge, professional service capabilities, management expertise and digital literacy, which hinders quality improvement and innovation for social organizations.

5. Optimized development paths for social organizations' participation in Shanxi rural revitalization

5.1. Enhance targeted policy implementation and apply differentiated support measures

Improve the working mechanism covering designated poverty-alleviation counties, overall arrangement by civil-affairs authorities, project implementation by social organizations, plus evaluation and feedback from beneficiaries. Build a project database for social-organization-led rural revitalization to realize precise supply-demand matching and targeted support. Scale up fiscal input for under-developed counties such as Lüliang and Xinzhou. Implement customized assistance schemes under the "one village, one plan" principle, taking full account of regional resource endowments and development bottlenecks.

5.2. Improve the talent-training system and reinforce talent support

Include social-organization practitioners within local holistic talent planning. Optimize policies for talent recruitment, professional evaluation and salary security. Promote university-social-organization cooperation to carry out order-oriented talent cultivation. Improve compensation for social-work posts to cut staff turnover. Curricula shall combine policy regulations and theoretical learning while expanding practical case-teaching modules. Develop integrated online-offline training courses to lift practitioners' overall competencies comprehensively.

5.3. Raise the level of digital empowerment

Apply Internet-of-Things and big-data technologies to empower agricultural production, facilitate smart planting and breeding and boost agricultural output and quality. Leverage e-commerce platforms to

expand sales channels for farm produce and foster the new model of "smart agriculture plus social-work services". Deliver digital-skill training for villagers to strengthen their internet literacy for production and rural-governance engagement. Adopt digital tools to collect and sort folk customs and oral-history materials, build digital archives for local culture and protect rural cultural heritage resources.

6. Conclusion

Social organizations constitute an important social force advancing comprehensive rural revitalization and perfecting pluralistic rural governance in Shanxi Province. At present, Shanxi social organizations have yielded fruitful local practical outcomes in rural revitalization, achieving prominent progress in income-boosting industrial projects, women's employment growth, intangible-cultural-heritage revitalization and specialty-agriculture upgrading. Nevertheless, practical constraints persist: regional development imbalance, insufficient project sustainability and talent shortages. In the new era, participation mechanisms for social organizations should be continuously optimized through targeted policy empowerment, systematic talent cultivation, in-depth local-industry development and digital-technology upgrading. This will drive social organizations to shift from short-term assistance toward long-term empowerment and from extensive participation toward targeted services, so as to underpin comprehensive rural revitalization and grassroots-governance modernization across Shanxi Province.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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