

Cooptating the New Elites: Targeted Poverty Alleviation and Policy Implementation in Rural China

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Abstract

How do cadres provisionally and strategically dispatched from superior governments interact with different rural elites to implement national policy in China? This article examines the case of Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) program to illustrate the mechanism of national policy implementation in rural areas within current China's bureaucracy change and emergence of new elites in villages. Two mechanisms have been detected: the division of work between sent-down cadres and village cadres, and the cooptation of new elites by sent-down cadres. Specifically, the sent-down cadres make use of economic and political resources and institutions to co-opt economic elites and skilled talents that could be seen as new elites in villages during the TPA period. Therefore, this study reveals that the structural change in contemporary rural China under TPA program affects policy implementation and new elites play a vital role in strengthening national policy implementation. This study contributes to the theoretical knowledge on the rural elites' effect on policy implementation by highlighting the cooptation mechanism of dispatched cadres as an evolution of bureaucracy. This pattern seems to be the "soft intervention" to the Chinese rural society. The findings imply that the state as an adaptive mechanism remains historical legacies in the implementation of state policies.

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