“SUSPENDING VILLAGE” A MODEL OF NEW DEVELOPMENT AREA IN THE NINGXIA HUI AUTONOMOUS REGION OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT: The southern part of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in China was infamous for its poverty and serious soil erosion caused by over population. In order to alleviate poverty and backwardness, a plan was worked out: to remove 200,000 people to the north plain by developing newly irrigated land during the period of 1983–1992. The plan has been in operation for eight and half years to date. About 200,000 people have been removed from the poor southern part to the newly developed area, and 800,000 mu (1/15 ha) of desert land has been cultivated. Most of the migrants have been lifted out of poverty and the people's life in the south is being improved. During the immigration process, a model, called “Suspending Village”, has been developed. In the article, the whole process of the development and the strategies are discussed.

KEY WORDS: Suspending Village, regional development, population resettlement

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is located in the northwest China. The Hanghe (Yellow) River flows through the region from middle–east to north. It is a province in which the Chinese Muslim—Hui Nationality is concentrated, who form about one third of the total population, hence the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.

From 1983 to 1990, about 200,000 people were successfully removed from the overpopulated hilly area to newly developed irrigated area by a model called “Suspending Village”. It is a great achievement in the history of population redistribution and regional development.
Ningxia is naturally divided into two parts: the northern plain area and the southern hilly area. Their physical and economic environment are quite different.

The northern part, including four cities and eight counties, is an arid and semiarid plain area. The annual precipitation is less than 200 mm. The Huanghe River flows across the northern part, with an annual discharge of 32.5 billion m$^3$, greatly contributing to the economic development in this area. Agriculture, industry and other human activities in the plain are dependent on water resources withdrawn from the Huanghe River. There would be no agriculture without irrigation although other conditions such as temperature, soil, landscape etc. are suitable for a variety of crops. The history of irrigation development in the area is long, and can even be traced back to 2,000 years ago. At present, it is a famous oasis in the northwest China. As long as establishing irrigation system, the fertile land here can be used. The southern part including eight counties is located in the transitional zone between the Loess Plateau and desert. The topography is mainly loess hills combined with small tablelands and basins. The annual precipitation is about 300 to 500 mm, a little more than that in the northern part, but surface water is scarce. The local people used to rely on unirrigated cultivation. They could maintain a simple life because of low population density. However, during the past four decades, population increased rapidly, but grain production increased slowly due to the limited natural conditions of the land. The per capita grain production, for example, decreased from 323 kg in the 1950s to 192 kg in the 1980s. As a consequence of overpopulation, water and soil erosion became more serious, natural disasters occurred more often. The living standard lowered and people lacked adequate food and drinking water, so the area became infamous for its poverty in China.

The government provided relief grain and fund for the poor people year by year. In the 1970s, about 60,000 tons of grain was imported into this area every year. The assistance from the government only helped to resolve small problems, and was not enough to help the poor people to eliminate poverty. The crux of the matter is that such poor land could not shoulder the large population.

II. "SUSPENDING VILLAGE": A PLAN OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND POPULATION RESETTLEMENT

In order to eliminate poverty in the southern hilly area, a ten-year plan was made to remove 200,000 people from the poor areas to the northern part developing irrigation systems during the period of 1983–1992. The plan was made and implemented by the local government. The investment comes from the central government and the World Bank.

There are a lot of lessons to be learnt from the history of population migration in this area. During the 1950s and the 1960s, for example, 170,000 people were moved from outside to Ningxia to reclaim wasteland. According to investigation, only 6.8 per cent of the migrants settle down there now. The lessons pushed the planners to find some more suitable