Revitalizing the Qinba Mountain Area: Tackling Poverty through Optimized Industry Structure

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Abstract

This essay examines the Qinba Mountain Area's transition from historical prosperity to its current status as one of China's most impoverished regions, primarily due to environmental challenges, inadequate infrastructure, and weak industrial support. It identifies modern issues such as limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities as main problems brought by poverty. The proposed poverty alleviation strategies focus on developing local industries, enhancing infrastructure, and improving social security measures, aiming to leverage the region's unique advantages for sustainable development. Through targeted interventions, the essay underscores the potential for significantly improving living standards and economic prospects in the Qinba Mountain Area.

1 Introduction

The Qinba Mountain Area, a region with a rich and dynamic history, has undergone significant economic transformations over the centuries. This introduction on poverty alleviation in the Qinba Mountain Area will outline its historical evolution and current development strategies.

1.1 Historical Development

The economic development of the Qinba area saw new growth following the Song Dynasty. The region between Jing and Xiang, known for its fertile lands, was the most economically advanced area, as recorded in "History of the Song Dynasty". Places like Xiangzhou were celebrated for their beautiful scenery and fertile soil, abundant in mulberry and hemp fields, and known as a land of fish and rice. Similarly, Junzhou (now Shiyan) and Yingzhou (around Jingmen and Zhongxiang) were important agricultural bases. The Northern Song government implemented policies to encourage cultivation in Tang and Deng (now Nanyang, Henan), leading to prosperous agriculture.

During the Song Dynasty, there was a significant increase in productivity, marking the emergence of early capitalism. Citizens began to diversify their economic activities beyond agriculture, venturing into manual industries that embarked on a primitive path toward industrialization. The control over land loosened considerably, allowing for the free buying and selling of land. From the beginning of the Song Dynasty, the restrictive employing relationships that limited personal freedom were greatly reduced, and capitalistic marketplaces started to appear. At this time, the Qinba Mountain Area, serving as an economic hub, saw its inhabitants mainly engaged in agriculture and small-scale manual industries. The region's support capacity for large-scale industries was weak, explaining the rapid decline of the Qinba Mountain Area in the subsequent dynasties. [1]

During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, as China's ancient economic center shifted south, the Qinba region's economic growth slowed, though not completely halted. However, since the late Qing Dynasty and into modern times, the Qinba Mountain Area has experienced slower economic development compared to other regions in China. This lag in progress has increasingly widened the gap between Qinba and the rest of the country. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the region has faced several challenges that have contributed to its status as one of the most impoverished areas in the nation. These challenges include inconvenient transportation, outdated and insufficient infrastructure, a deteriorating natural ecological environment, as well as a lag in modernizing local concepts and a prevailing sense of isolation.

These historical and ongoing challenges have significantly influenced the region's economic and social landscape, setting the backdrop for the current poverty alleviation efforts. Understanding these factors is crucial for framing the current strategies and actions being implemented to improve the living conditions and economic prospects of the Qinba Mountain Area.

1.2 Development Strategy

In response to the region's historical economic challenges, the State Council's "Qinba Area Regional Development and Poverty Alleviation Plan 2011-2020" outlines a rational development strategy. This plan emphasizes building Shiyan, Hanzhong, and Bazhong as key central cities, expanding urban spaces, optimizing urban forms, and enhancing urban functions. The goal is to promote population and industrial agglomeration, strengthen characteristic industries, and improve radiating and driving functions. The plan envisions an economic development pattern known as "One Belt, Three Centers, Five Corridors", aiming to create a spatial structure where development elements are concentrated, industrial features are prominent, regional connections are tight, and urban systems are well-developed.

This comprehensive approach, blending historical understanding with contemporary strategy, sets the stage for discussing poverty alleviation in the Qinba Mountain Area.

2 Situation Analysis

2.1 Causes of Poverty in the Qinba Mountain Area

1. **Harsh Natural Environment:** The Qinba Mountain Area, spanning across Shaanxi, Gansu, Sichuan, Hubei, and Henan provinces, is characterized by its rugged terrain and harsh climate. Frequent natural disasters, including floods and landslides, exacerbate the living conditions, leading to crop failures and destruction of homes.

2. **Inconvenient Transportation:** The area's geographic isolation is compounded by inadequate transportation infrastructure, making access to markets, healthcare, and educational facilities challenging. The lack of connectivity not only hinders economic development but also affects the ability of residents to seek better employment opportunities and access essential services.

3. **Weak Industrial Support:** The region's economy is primarily agrarian, with limited industrial development. This lack of diverse income sources limits the residents' ability to break the cycle of poverty. The economic stagnation is vividly illustrated by the plight of families who, despite possessing the will, lack the means to improve their living standards due to the absence of stable and lucrative employment opportunities.
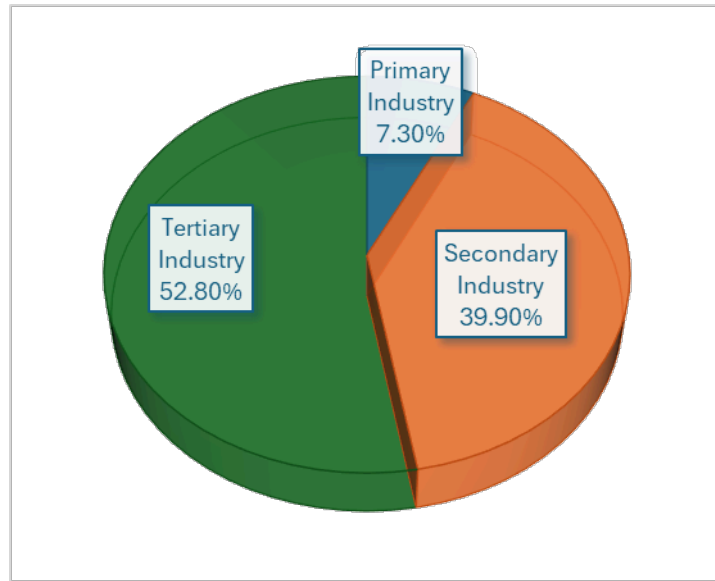
Figure 1: The Increased Value of The Three Industries as a Proportion of The GDP in China in 2022
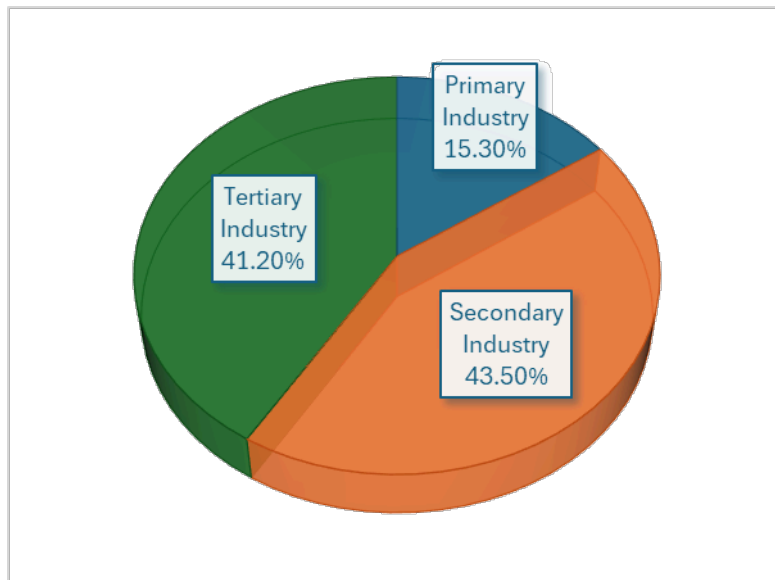

Figure 2: The Increased Value of The Three Industries as a Proportion of The GDP in Hanzhong, Shaanxi in 2022

According to Figure 1 [2] and Figure 2 [3], the proportion of Hanzhong's primary industry in GDP is much higher than the national average, which indicates that agriculture still plays an important role in local economy with a relatively weaker industrial support.

2.2 Illustrative Cases from the Qinba Mountain Area

- The economic hardships faced by disabled individuals and elderly patients underscore the region's lack of support and care systems. The story of local people who struggle to afford medication for chronic diseases, reflects the broader issue of healthcare accessibility and affordability.

- The impact of education costs on impoverished families is another critical aspect. Local families have to incur significant debt to finance children's education, highlighting the financial strain placed on families by the pursuit of higher education.

2.3 Conclusion

The challenges faced by the Qinba Mountain Area are indicative of the complex interplay between natural adversities, infrastructural deficiencies, and economic underdevelopment. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that not only focuses on immediate relief but also on long-term strategies to improve infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. The personal stories from the region serve as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for targeted interventions to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life for its residents.

3 Solutions

The strategy to alleviate poverty in the Qinba Mountain Area involves a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, addressing the root causes of poverty through the development of characteristic industries, enhancement of village infrastructure, economic development at the county level, improvement of social security capacity, and adherence to ecological protection. These strategies offer a roadmap for sustainable poverty alleviation.

3.1 Strategies [4]

3.1.1 Development of Local Advantage Industries to Increase Income

Improve Local Specialty Industries. Develop and expand orchard bases, with poor households owning an average of 0.59 acres each, leading in absolute numbers and per capita in the region. This approach ensures income generation through the utilization of local agricultural strengths.

Utilize Existing Labor Resources. With a high percentage of the poor population engaged in local employment and a significant proportion being of working age, there's a labor force ready to support the development of these industries.

Engage Active Market Participants. Foster growth through a "leading enterprise + base + farmer" model, developing brands and cooperatives that enhance the value of agricultural products, thereby increasing income for poor households.

Special Poverty Alleviation Programs. Implement small loan programs and vocational training for the unemployed poor, aiming to improve their income-generating capabilities and prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty.

3.1.2 Strengthen Infrastructure Construction to Break Development Bottlenecks

Comprehensive Village Development: Focus on improving roads, water supply, electricity, housing, and income-generating industries, employing a precise poverty alleviation approach that gathers resources from government, society, and the market to address these issues systematically.

3.1.3 Promote Regional Economic Development to Enhance Self-Sufficiency

Emphasize the integration of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries, focusing on ecological agriculture, strengthening manufacturing industries, and developing eco-tourism to create a sustainable economic model that benefits the local population.

3.1.4 Improve Social Security Capacity to Ensure Equal Access to Public Services

Address healthcare, education, and elderly care to reduce the urban-rural divide. Enhance medical assistance, expand educational support programs, and facilitate the orderly transfer of rural labor to improve living standards and economic conditions.

3.1.5 Prioritize Ecological Protection to Balance Development and Sustainability

Focus on ecological conservation, governance, and environmental protection to ensure the sustainable development of the region. This includes leveraging national policies for ecological compensation and developing industries that are compatible with environmental conservation.

4 Effects

Figure 3: Local Residents Making Bamboo Chairs

According to Figure 3, the government utilizes local labor resources and mobilized residents to participate in weaving bamboo chairs and selling them for extra income. The adoption of a cooperative model for handicraft production has provided direct income to poor households and offered employment opportunities within the community.

Figure 4: High-tech Edible Fungus Planting Factory

Given Figure 4, the government has introduced automated agricultural technology and established edible fungus production plants according to local conditions to enhance the support capacity of agriculture in the economy. Infrastructure improvements, such as road expansions, have facilitated access to markets and services, enabling villagers to engage in more profitable agricultural activities.

These examples underscore the importance of a coordinated and comprehensive approach to poverty alleviation that addresses both immediate needs and long-term sustainability. By focusing on the

five strategic areas mentioned before, the Qinba Mountain Area can make significant strides toward reducing poverty and enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

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