

Developing Village-Based Green Economy in an Endogenous Way

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The idea of green economy is being taken seriously all over the world. For developing countries, the key to developing green economy is to strike a balance between environmental protection and economic development. As the largest developing country, China has been exploring scientific schemes to deal with the relationship between environmental protection and economic development. Developing rural tourism is an important way to transform ecological advantages into economic benefits.

Keywords: green economy ; sustainable development ; endogenous development ; rural tourism ; China

1. Introduction

At the beginning of last century, all countries were pursuing their own economic prosperity and revitalization. During this period, they completely ignored a series of negative impacts of economic development on the environment. Consuming resources and destroying the environment became a broad development strategy for all countries to become powerful at that time. It was not until some developed countries took the lead in modernization that they began to attach importance to environmental protection. As can be seen from the dynamics of the country rankings for sustainable development, the assessment of the dominance of developed countries since the 1990s assumes that environmental protection has become the first priority ^[1]. In contrast, despite remarkable economic growth over the same period, the deterioration of the ranking showed that China lacked effective environmental protection measures at that time. This is not unique to China, but a common feature of economic development in most developing countries ^{[2][3]}. Endless economic growth is impossible and should be stopped. Moreover, sustainable economic development and environmental protection are mutually reinforcing. Environmental protection is an important part of realizing sustainable economic development and one of the objective standards to measure the quality of sustainable economic development. The modern economy is increasingly inseparable from the support of environment and resources. Promoting sustainable economic development, protecting the ecological environment and effectively utilizing resources have become the consensus and common strategy of the green economy.

For developed countries, it seems easier to strike a balance between economic development and environmental protection. However, for developing countries, how to get rid of poverty while protecting the environment is a dilemma. Environmental protection and poverty alleviation are both important issues for governments in developing countries. The complex links between poverty and environmental degradation is still the focus of much research and debate ^[4]. However, there is a growing consensus, albeit in a rather piecemeal approach, on which policy instruments will be used to tackle both problems. The current thrust is mainly to pay for environmental services (PES) to correct market failures that lead to excessive environmental degradation ^{[5][6][7]}. On the other hand, conditional cash transfer (CCT) projects are being implemented to correct market failures that have led to underinvestment in social security in developing countries ^[8]. Although the above measures have been taken to alleviate the contradiction between economic development and environmental protection, they still cannot fundamentally solve the dilemma faced by developing countries. Existing policies are mostly based on the entire country's environment and development issues, without in-depth analysis at the micro level. Most articles fail to find how villagers can play a greater role in achieving green economic development. To solve the dilemma between environmental protection and economic development, efforts should be made to extend the experience of one unit to the whole region.

As the world's largest developing country, China is constantly exploring scientific solutions to deal with the relationship between environmental protection and economic development. On 15 August 2005, Comrade Xi Jinping, then Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee, inspected a village called Yucun in Anji County, Huzhou City, Zhejiang Province. Comrade Xi learned that Yucun had closed its mines and planned to turn to developing ecotourism. He highly

affirmed this point and put forward a scientific thesis that “green mountains are gold mountains”. It can be said that Yucun is the epitome of China’s green development, which deeply proves the truth that “green mountains are gold mountains”. Developing rural tourism is an important way to transform ecological advantages into economic benefits. However, the role of rural tourism has always been controversial in academic circles. Some scholars pointed out the problems brought by the development of rural tourism, including the shock on traditional livelihood, destruction of local resources, excessive commercialization of culture, disappearance of agricultural knowledge, unfair distribution, investment loss, and so on [8][9][10][11][12][13][14]. The problems mentioned by scholars do occur frequently in some developing countries, and their doubts and concerns are justified. So, how can rural tourism in developing countries avoid these problems in the era of green economy? The theory of endogenous development provides important reference for this.

2. Green Economy Concept and Its Spread in China

Green economy is a new economic development concept based on the concept of sustainable development, which is committed to improving human welfare and social equity, and greatly reducing environmental and ecological risks [15]. The term was first put forward by British environmental economist David Untidy. He proposed that green economy is an affordable economy built on social and ecological conditions [16]. Since then, the concept of “weak sustainability” with the theme of “economic growth can offset environmental and social losses” has rapidly formed a consensus in western developed countries. Western scholars have carried out a large number of studies on energy utilization efficiency and environmental pollution in economic development [17][18][19][20][21], and the concept of green economy has been extended in practice. The financial crisis around 2008 provided a historic opportunity for the rise of the green economy. The green economy has received unprecedented attention as the economic crisis has forced countries around the world to rethink economic policies and incorporate green and low-carbon concepts into fiscal plans to stimulate economic and job growth. Countries began to pay attention to the non-reduction of natural capital to enhance sustainability, which emphasizes the transition from passive governance to active investment and uses economic investment to promote the growth of ecological assets.

The concept of green economy has been widely spread around the world, and has been recognized and supported by more and more countries. The Chinese government not only recognizes the concept of green economy, but also attaches great importance to its implementation. However, the difficulty lies in promoting green development in rural areas. Farmers in developing countries often need a long process to accept the concept of green development due to their low overall quality. The primary problem facing the Chinese government is how to emancipate the minds of farmers and guide them to accept the new concept of green development. Therefore, to find a more appropriate way for rural residents to correctly treat the relationship between economic development and ecological environment is necessary. “Green mountains are gold mountains”, proposed by the Chinese government under President Xi, has brought the concept of green development to the countryside in an accessible way. On 24 August 2005, Comrade Xi published a commentary in Zhejiang Daily. It is mainly pointed that: green mountains can bring money, but money cannot buy green mountains; green mountains and gold mountains can produce contradictions and dialectical unity; when you cannot have your cake and eat it, you have to understand the opportunity cost and be good at making a choice; find the right direction and create conditions to turn green mountains into gold mountains; if ecological advantages are turned into economic advantages, such as ecological agriculture, ecological industry and eco-tourism, then green mountains are mountains of gold. The two-mountain slogan not only makes the concept of green economy deeply rooted in people’s hearts in a vivid metaphor and easily understandable way, but also emphasizes the responsibility of the governments of developing countries in promoting the green development.

3. Endogenous Development Theory and Rural Tourism Controversy

The endogenous development theory originated from the reflection and criticism of the external development mode in the 1960s and 1970s. Driven by economic globalization, profit-oriented capital has injected impetus into the industrialization and urbanization of various countries. The central position of cities has been continuously strengthened, while rural areas are increasingly facing problems, such as marginalization, hollowing out and involution. In this process, the exogenous development mode is widely used in the specific practice of rural development, and its core idea is that the intervention of external forces can stimulate rural development. However, its profit-seeking nature makes it become a force to plunder rural resources and aggravate rural depression. In the exogenous development mode, the intervention of external forces limits the autonomy of rural residents, ignores or even tramples on non-economic factors such as local humanities and ecology, resulting in the dilemma of subject loss and role alienation in the process of rural development [22]. In 1976, Japanese scholars put forward the endogenous development theory and believed that rural revitalization can be realized through endogenous development, that is, “people in different regions create it by self-discipline based on their inherent

resources and heritage, drawing on foreign knowledge, technology and systems” [23]. Hereafter, UNESCO published a book named “Endogenous Development Strategy”, pointing out that endogenous development is generated internally and serves the people [24]. Different from the exogenous development, the endogenous development is essentially a self-directed development, which realizes the bottom-up transformation of rural development, highlights the local autonomy and initiative, gives full play to the role of the community, and emphasizes the decision-making power of local development choices, the control over the development process and the enjoyment of development benefits [25]. The internal realization path of endogenous development lies in: the first is to pay attention to local participation; the second is to cultivate local identity; the third is the protective development of local resources [26][27]. Ray believed that all development difficulties faced by rural areas could be improved by taking actions; however, rural development cannot completely rely on its own endogenous forces to achieve “pure” endogenous development, which was too idealistic in the context of globalization [28]. In addition to the premise of local participation, local identity, and local resources, the realization of the endogenous development of the village should also pay attention to the interaction and connection between the place and its environment [29]. In other words, the endogenous development mode should be a combination of both external and internal drivers.

Endogenous development theory provides useful reference for rural tourism. There has been controversy in academic circles about the impact of rural tourism development on rural community and farmers’ livelihood. On the one hand, many supporters believe that tourism can provide rural communities with a large number of employment opportunities and higher income, thus improving residents’ livelihoods and reducing their dependence on natural resources [30]. It can also change residents’ attitude towards biodiversity conservation and promote residents’ awareness and participation in environmental protection [31]. Ecotourism is regarded as an indispensable means of the conservation of natural resources and the development of local communities. The development of rural tourism is shaping a new relationship between man and nature, man and community [32]. It forces people to re-examine and update the traditional moral concepts and institutional arrangements [33]. On the other hand, opponents argue that ecotourism will lead to environmental degradation, destruction of wildlife habitat, economic loss, loss of income and unfair distribution, which will lead to the decline of residents’ willingness to protect [8][9][10][11][12][13][14]. The poor get little direct benefit from tourism, but bear a lot of costs [13]. The income from tourism often fails to offset the costs of tourism development. External forces of tourism development often have absolute control over local resources, so tourism will inevitably aggravate the stratification of residents in poor areas and widen the gap between the rich and the poor [14]. The rapid development of tourism will bring a series of new rural vulnerability problems, such as the deterioration of traditional social management structure in the community, the collapse of neighboring relations, the excessive commercialization of national culture, and the gradual disappearance of agricultural knowledge [10][12]. As a matter of fact, whether poor residents can benefit from tourism depends on what kind of tourism development mode they choose [34]. The endogenous development mode emphasizes the principles of local resources, local identity, and local participation. Therefore, only by implementing the endogenous development mode can the village not only stimulate the positive role of rural tourism and form a virtuous cycle, but also avoid the negative effects of rural tourism previously pointed out by scholars.

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