

Original Paper

Research on Resources and Pathways for Building a Culture of the Rule of Law in Rural Revitalization in Western China

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Abstract

The western region plays a crucial role in the rural revitalization strategy, where the construction of a rule of law culture is both a necessary requirement for cultural revitalization and an important guarantee for rural revival. The resources for building a rule of law culture in the western region can be categorized into general resources and endogenous resources. General resources are accessible to the western region as well as other areas in the rural revitalization process, while endogenous resources are derived from the region's unique historical and cultural background. The type of resources available for building a rule of law culture determines the implementation pathways. From the perspective of resource utilization, it is essential to leverage both general and endogenous resources under the leadership of the Party to ensure a sustainable rule of law culture construction that supports rural revitalization.

Keywords

Western Region, Rural Revitalization, Rule of Law Culture Construction, Local Resources

1. Introduction of the Issue

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) made the strategic plan for rural revitalization. The report of the 20th National Congress of the CPC pointed out that in the comprehensive drive to build a modern socialist country, the most arduous and onerous tasks still lie in rural areas. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the Central Rural Work Conference: "We must fully advance the 'Five Revitalizations'—of industry, talent, culture, ecology, and organizations. We need to make coordinated plans for their promotion, advance them in a synergistic manner, focus on key areas, and address weaknesses" (Lu Yang, 2024). The "Five Revitalizations" include cultural revitalization, and it is clear that the development of the rule of law culture in rural areas cannot exist independently of cultural revitalization in the course of rural revitalization.

Every culture has its specific legal system, and every legal system is rooted in its specific culture (Bernhard Grossfeld, 2002). "The rule of law in a country or region can never be genuine or enduring if it fails to take root in the cultural context" (Liu Zuoxiang, 2012). Against the backdrop of comprehensively advancing the rule of law, building a culture of the rule of law serves as the "soul-forging" cornerstone of rural revitalization. Conversely, the cultivation of such a culture in rural areas is an inevitable outcome of developing law-based rural communities. In other words, fostering a culture of the rule of law empowers rural revitalization, while the development of this culture itself constitutes a vital component of rural revitalization.

Regional rule of law culture is shaped through long-term historical evolution and development, and is the result of the combined influence of factors such as the natural geographical environment, economic production methods, historical and cultural traditions, ethnic integration, and cultural exchanges (Xia Jinwen & Chen Xiaojie, 2015). It refers to a type of rule of law culture that bears distinct regional characteristics and is created by local social groups within the specific context of a given region. As an extensive area in China with prominent and diverse cultural features, the western region has unique characteristics in its rule of law culture development. Its efforts in this regard should not only align with the national "unified overall plan" for rule of law culture development in the context of rural revitalization, but also be carried out in light of its local cultural traits, ultimately achieving public recognition of the legal culture.

Cultural revitalization should involve in-depth exploration of the essence of fine traditional culture, which echoes the notion that the development of the rule of law should not only follow "top-down" reforms, but also identify and leverage local resources (See Su Li, 1996). From the perspective of resources for building a rule of law culture in the context of rural revitalization, we can analyze the topic from two dimensions: first, "general resources"—the components that the western region can obtain through the "top-down" national "unified overall plan" for rural revitalization; second, "endogenous resources"—the "local resources" that the western region can utilize in the process of rural revitalization. We recognize that it is precisely the resources for building a rural revitalization rule of law culture that determine its development path; therefore, when discussing these resources, we must not neglect to envision corresponding development approaches.

2. General Resources for Building a Rule of Law Culture in Rural Revitalization of Western China

From a universal perspective, western China, like other regions across the country, has access to general resources for building a rule of law culture in the context of rural revitalization. In our view, these resources can be examined from the following aspects:

2.1 Institutional Supply for Building a Rule of Law Culture in Rural Revitalization

Institutions refer to formal behavioral rules with external enforceability. From this definition, the institutional supply for a rural revitalization rule of law culture should include both legal systems and policy guidance.

2.1.1 Legal Systems

Legal systems serve as the textual basis for building a rule of law culture in rural revitalization and also represent its direct manifestation. At the legal level, China's legislation on rural revitalization centers primarily on the Rural Revitalization Promotion Law. This law provides an overarching framework for all aspects of rural revitalization, including a dedicated chapter on "Cultural Prosperity." Its enactment marks a milestone in the legalization of rural revitalization and the development of a rule of law culture for rural revitalization.

At the local legislative level, some regions across China have formulated Rural Revitalization Promotion Regulations based on relevant laws and administrative regulations such as the Rural Revitalization Promotion Law, while aligning with the actual conditions of their respective provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government). (As of June 9, 2024, all regions in Western China—except Yunnan Province and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region—have enacted their own Rural Revitalization Promotion Regulations. Additionally, some cities [prefectures] and counties have developed similar local regulations, such as the Regulations on Promoting Rural Revitalization of the Aba and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture and the Regulations on Promoting Rural Industrial Revitalization of the Datong Hui and Tu Autonomous County.) Beyond the aforementioned legislation, other laws and relevant regulations—including the Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees, the Civil Code, the Criminal Law, the Environmental Protection Law, and the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests—do not directly address rural revitalization in their core content. However, as integral components of the socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics, they also provide content-based foundations and institutional guidance for building a rule of law culture in rural revitalization.

2.1.2 Policy Orientation

Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's new era rule of law thought, guided by the core socialist values, the state and local governments have formulated a series of policies to continuously promote the construction of the rule of law culture of rural revitalization from the actual level. At the policy level of the Party and the state, the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Promoting the Rule of Law" adopted by the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed to build a socialist legal culture. The report of the 19th National Congress put forward a clearer requirement: "Increase the efforts to popularize the law among the people, build a socialist legal culture, and establish the rule of law concept that the Constitution and laws are supreme and everyone is equal before the law." The "Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan (2018-2022)" of the Party Central Committee and the State Council clearly require that "in-depth 'laws enter rural areas' publicity and education activities should be carried out in-depth, improve farmers' legal literacy, and guide cadres and the masses to respect, learn, abide by and use the law." The "Guiding Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Rural Governance" points out that it is necessary to "vigorously carry out the creation of a 'democratic and legal demonstration village',

carry out the 'law into the countryside' activities in depth, implement the rural 'law understander' training project, cultivate a group of 'rule of law leaders' with village cadres and people' mediators as the focus, and carry out in-depth rural legal publicity and education." In 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Rule of Law Culture", requiring that "the construction of socialist rule of law culture be regarded as a strategic and basic work in building a socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics and a socialist country ruled by law, and the construction of a socialist cultural power", and deployed the main tasks of building a socialist rule of law culture.

Under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, local governments have also introduced distinctive and practical policies and measures to advance the development of a rule-of-law culture in rural revitalization, tailored to their specific conditions. For instance, the Gansu Province Rural Revitalization Promotion Regulation "encourages eligible areas to establish public legal service studios within villagers' committees." In Chengguan Town, Yuzhong County, a physical platform for public legal services has been constructed, featuring a village legal advisor system. The legal services provided are diverse in content and form, with a well-structured team of staff who demonstrate strong commitment to service (Tang Guiyao & Zhang Kun, 2024). Shanghai has launched a "Rule of Law Culture Festival," promoting the development of a rule-of-law culture through initiatives such as "carrying forward the red gene," "creating a grand legal event," and "empowering legal technology" (Yu Dongming & Huang Haodong, 2024).

2.2 Organizational Support for Building a Rule of Law Culture in Rural Revitalization

The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Guidelines on Strengthening the Development of a Socialist Rule of Law Culture emphasize the organizational support required for fostering a socialist rule of law culture, outlining specific measures in four key areas: strengthening organizational leadership, improving operational mechanisms, enhancing talent development, and promoting model initiatives. In practice, various measures to advance the rule of law culture—such as "legal education lecture teams" and volunteer services dedicated to promoting legal culture—are all implemented through the coordination of Party organizations and relevant government bodies. It can be said that Party organizations and relevant state institutions, particularly the cultivation and expansion of legal talent, serve as fundamental guarantees and core forces in the process of rural revitalization and the development of a rule of law culture, not only in western China but across the entire nation.

2.3 Autonomous Development of Rule of Law Culture in Rural Areas

In recent years, with the rapid development of central and western regions and the implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, many migrant workers have been able to find employment opportunities in their hometowns. At the same time, a growing number of young people and college graduates are returning to rural areas to start businesses. As the Rural Revitalization Strategy and the domestic economic circulation system continue to advance, the movement of people from urban back to rural areas

is expected to become more frequent. This return of labor will emerge as a regular economic trend, significantly impacting social and economic development in rural regions (Zhao Yihuan, 2023). Culture stems from the lives of the people. The return of population to rural areas will naturally generate a practical demand for rule of law culture and will inevitably lead to progress in building a legal cultural environment.

During this process, as populations gather and local industries thrive, the demand for legal knowledge and access to legal services increases. This will, in turn, give rise to the development of public legal services and create opportunities for legal professions. Such conditions provide fertile ground for fostering a culture of the rule of law in rural areas—marking a transition from spontaneous growth to conscious development.

2.4 Cross-Regional Exchange in Rule of Law Culture

From the perspective of regional rule of law culture, individual regions maintain diverse and complex connections with the nation as a whole, while also engaging in synthetic and interactive relationships with other regions. (See note above). Although different areas possess distinct cultural characteristics due to factors such as geography and historical heritage, they remain interconnected. The formation of a rule of law culture does not occur through “independent evolution”; rather, it is the result of mutual influence. Like other parts of China, the western region participates in cultural exchanges, which play a significant role in building a rule of law culture within rural revitalization. Currently, in western China, cross-regional cultural exchange manifests in two distinct aspects based on different legal spheres:

First, rule of Law Cultural Exchange with Countries Along the Belt and Road. Historical experience shows that as the Belt and Road Initiative advances decisively, China will undoubtedly engage in extensive, in-depth, and long-term cultural exchanges with participating countries across multiple domains (Wang Zhilai, 2017). There is broad consensus on enhancing the rule of law in Belt and Road development and strengthening its legal safeguards—whether from the perspective of improving the business environment or promoting high-quality development (Huang Huikang, 2024). In this process, western China, serving as the starting point and strategic hub of the new Silk Road under the Belt and Road Initiative, has become a site where legal cultures from different countries and regions interact and enrich one another. Under the new dynamics of coupled development with rural revitalization (Zhang Chunyan, 2024), a distinctive rule of law culture unique to the Belt and Road context is taking shape in the western region.

Second, domestic cross-regional legal culture exchanges. Chinese rule of law culture is a diverse and unified rule of law culture community formed by the exchange and integration of rule of law cultures in multiple regions. (Synonyms of the previous note). At present, with rural revitalization and the construction of a unified national market, the rule of law culture in the western region will continue to develop with the rule of law culture in other regions of the country in the process of its construction. Through contact, mixing, connecting and integrating, and at the same time, there is also division and extinction, forming a diversified unity with you and I come and go, I have you and I have me, and each

has its own characteristics" (Fei Xiaotong, 1989).

3. Endogenous Resources for the Construction of Rule of Law Culture in Rural Revitalization in the Western Region

The western region has a land area of 6.87 million square kilometers, accounting for 72% of the country, and many of them are ethnic settlements. Although not all cultural elements can be used for the construction of a legal culture for rural revitalization, the rich and colorful historical and cultural heritage in the western region still provides very fulfilling endogenous resources for the construction of a legal culture for rural revitalization. A more American translation of this passage.

3.1 Village Rules and Community Agreements

When it comes to the primary endogenous resource for building a rule of law culture in rural revitalization, village rules and community agreements stand out. In December 2018, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and six other departments jointly issued the Guidelines on Promoting Village Rules and Community Agreements, requiring that all villages and communities across the country formulate or revise practical and effective rules and agreements by 2020, thereby advancing a modern grassroots governance mechanism that integrates self-governance, rule of law, and moral stewardship under the leadership of Party organizations (Improving Modern Grassroots Social Governance Mechanisms and Forming Practical Village Rules and Community Agreements, 2024).

In the new era, these rules and agreements are codified in written form and developed through broad participation by Party organizations, collective bodies, and villagers. They not only reflect local rural realities but also play a significant role in reforming outdated customs and shaping an advanced socialist culture. Today, village rules and community agreements have been widely established and continuously refined in rural western China. Research shows that they have actively contributed to social governance in ethnic regions of the northwest by resolving ethnic conflicts and maintaining public order. Improving these agreements can further promote progress in local governance (Ma Jing, 2017).

3.2 Folk Customs

Folk customs represent a form of social norm distinct from national laws and are closely tied to the social environment and cultural knowledge of specific regions (Duojie Angxiu, 2023). Western China is characterized by its rich ethnic diversity. Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Guangxi are designated as ethnic autonomous regions, in addition to numerous autonomous prefectures, counties, and banners. Ethnic minorities maintain their own distinctive living customs, which are reflected in the folk practices of the western region.

It is generally recognized that folk customs can supplement statutory law where legal provisions are absent. For example, Article 10 of the Civil Code stipulates: "Civil disputes shall be handled in accordance with law; where no legal provision applies, customs may be invoked, provided that such customs do not violate public order or good morals." In ethnic regions, to respect local living traditions, the Constitution and the Legislation Law allow for adaptations to specific legal provisions. (See Article

4(4) of the Constitution and Article 85(2) of the Legislation Law). Some ethnic autonomous areas have enacted such adaptive regulations tailored to their unique circumstances. [Examples include the Adaptation of Marriage Age Provisions of the Civil Code by the Haibei Autonomous Prefecture and the Adaptation of Inheritance-Related Provisions of the Civil Code by the Aba and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture.]

3.3 Other Resources for the Culture of the Rule of Law

The Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of a Socialist Culture of the Rule of Law emphasize the need to “uphold inheritance and development, maintain integrity while innovating, promote fine traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture, learn from outstanding achievements in global legal civilization, and continuously develop and enrich the socialist culture of the rule of law.” Beyond the aforementioned endogenous resources, other cultural resources—including but not limited to regional historical and revolutionary culture—can also serve as endogenous foundations for building a culture of the rule of law in the western region.

3.3.1 Regional Historical Resources of the Rule of Law Culture

Regional historical legal culture forms an integral part of China’s traditional culture, serving as a cornerstone of the nation’s cultural diversity and a shining beacon of its outstanding traditional heritage. In building a socialist rule of law system with Chinese characteristics, it is essential to remain rooted in tradition by inheriting, transforming, and developing these historical resources (Yu Zhong, 2021). For instance, scholars have examined “Huxiang Culture” as a prominent component of China’s fine traditional culture, with “Huxiang Rule of Law Culture” representing a typical regional legal culture (Zhou Zhigang & Luo Fen, 2020). This demonstrates how regional historical legal culture serves as a vital resource for constructing a localized rule of law culture.

The western region boasts a long and rich historical culture, with both archaeological findings and documented records identifying it as a key cradle of Chinese civilization. Throughout history, this area has produced numerous legal-cultural events and influential figures whose ideas continue to profoundly impact modern society. Whether categorized by geography—such as Bashu, Longyuan, Sanqin, Mongolian, or Xiyu cultures—or by dynastic period, the essence of its legal culture, including concepts like “governing the country by law”, “the people are the foundation of the state”, and “promoting virtue and prudent punishment”, offers valuable resources for building a socialist rule of law culture. In the context of rural revitalization, promoting and preserving regional historical legal culture as a key aspect of “cultural revitalization” inherently contributes to the development of a socialist rule of law culture.

3.3.2 Revolutionary Cultural Resources

Modern China’s constitutional reform movements in the struggle for national salvation, along with the New Democratic Revolution led by the Communist Party of China, represent vivid chapters in the advancement of Chinese rule of law. As a crucial strategic rear during key historical periods, the western region made significant contributions to the Chinese revolution. It is home to numerous old revolutionary bases, red tourism sites, and sacred places of historical memory—many located in rural areas.

To achieve cultural revitalization in the countryside and build a socialist culture of the rule of law, it is essential to leverage the western region's rich revolutionary cultural resources. These include patriotic education bases, national unity progress education centers, sites dedicated to the history of the Party, and classic red tourism destinations.

Innovative approaches to cultural communication—such as creating immersive theatrical productions, music, film and television works, and developing thematic tourism products—should be employed to enhance the emotional appeal and broader influence of revolutionary culture. By starting with targeted local efforts, the aim is not only to foster a robust local legal culture but also to create a ripple effect that extends to surrounding regions and even the entire nation.

4. The Path to the Construction of Rural Revitalization Rule of Law Culture in Western Regions

4.1 Upholding the Leadership of the Communist Party of China

The construction of rural revitalization rule of law culture in western regions is not only a cultural and economic task, but also a political one. Upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China is the fundamental prerequisite for ensuring the correct direction of socialist rule of law culture construction and unwaveringly following the path of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics. Translate this paragraph into English in a way that is more American in style. Please provide only the final translation without any additional text.

4.2 Balancing Universal Resources and Endogenous Resources

From a dialectical perspective, universal resources and endogenous resources for advancing the rule of law in rural revitalization complement each other. Universal resources are accessible to both western and other regions of China. They require little to no development and can be deployed directly with appropriate guidance and coordination. Such resources tend not to reflect strong local characteristics.

In contrast, endogenous resources are deeply rooted in local context. They cannot be applied directly and must be developed intentionally in light of local history and culture. Approaches used in other regions cannot be simply replicated here.

Given this relationship, universal resources—due to their general and nationwide relevance—should serve as the primary foundation for building a culture of the rule of law in rural revitalization. Consistent with the principle of a unified national legal system and China's governance structure, these resources help establish the main framework of the rule of law culture. They provide institutional support, ensure the implementation of national laws, regulations, and policies, and capitalize on the historic opportunities presented by the rural revitalization strategy. Learning from regional experiences with the rule of law can further help shape the core elements of an advanced legal culture in western rural areas.

Meanwhile, endogenous resources, being culturally embedded, offer a powerful means to foster a sense of identity and ownership around the rule of law. While leveraging universal resources, it is essential to fully explore these local elements in order to develop a distinctive, culturally-grounded legal culture tailored to rural revitalization.

4.3 Maintaining Sustainable Development of a Rule of Law Culture in Rural Revitalization

From a resource utilization perspective, building a culture of the rule of law in rural revitalization should not be reduced to formalistic criteria such as “whether it was done,” “whether records were kept,” or “the scale of activities.” Instead, the focus should be on whether legal-cultural resources are fully and effectively utilized. Resources must neither lie idle nor be misused. Only through consistent and thoughtful effort can sustained progress be achieved. Specifically, we recommend the following approaches:

4.3.1 Determine Specific Approaches Based on Resource Characteristics

In recent years, as efforts to advance the culture of the rule of law have intensified, various regions have actively developed innovative formats for legal-cultural initiatives. Some areas have consciously built local “brands” for rule of law development, created new models for legal awareness campaigns, and established “demonstration bases for the rule of law.” These measures are accompanied by a series of legal-cultural activities (Liao Dongyun & Guo Fengqin, 2024), which have achieved widely recognized results.

However, it remains evident that many of these efforts—as reported in the media—emphasize superficial diversity in form and strive for “comprehensiveness” rather than “systematicness.” Pursuing breadth without a systemic approach often leads to imbalanced and fragmented outcomes.

Building on this foundation, we can further advance these efforts by first conducting comprehensive research and categorization of the locally available resources for building a culture of the rule of law. Based on their specific attributes, tailored strategies should then be developed to shape corresponding legal-cultural initiatives.

For instance, should a revolutionary artifact simply be displayed in exhibition cases and toured to different locations, or should it serve as creative inspiration for cultural and artistic works that amplify its reach and impact? Similarly, it is clear that the methods used to integrate the Civil Code and the Gansu Province Rural Revitalization Promotion Regulations into legal-cultural development cannot be identical; each demands a distinct approach to public legal education.

In this regard, Shanghai’s initiative to establish its first “Directory of Red Legal Resources” offers a instructive model. This effort focuses on the systematic identification, preservation, and utilization of legal resources rooted in revolutionary history—an approach worthy of study and adaptation.

4.3.2 Persist in the Construction of the Rule of Law Culture under the Comprehensive Revitalization of Rural Areas

The revitalization of rural areas encompasses five aspects: industrial revitalization, talent revitalization, cultural revitalization, ecological revitalization, and organizational revitalization. The construction of the rule of law culture falls under cultural revitalization, but cultural revitalization alone cannot achieve true rural revitalization. Industrial revitalization serves as the material foundation and top priority of rural revitalization; talent revitalization is the key to it; cultural revitalization is an important cornerstone and a vital source of internal drive for rural development; ecological revitalization is an inherent requirement.

On the one hand, cultural revitalization cannot be separated from the support of other aspects of rural revitalization. We should not view the construction of the rule of law culture in isolation, as culture gradually and slowly takes shape imperceptibly, and "law" also has a lag. Therefore, the construction of the rule of law culture cannot be rushed, but should be based on the local economic and social development situation of rural revitalization, formulating and adjusting strategies in a timely manner. On the other hand, precisely because cultural construction has "lag", when building a rule of law culture, we should summarize the past situation of rule of law construction in rural areas and build a more advanced rule of law culture on this basis.

4.3.3 Upholding the Joint Construction of the Rule of Law Culture by Multiple Entities

The "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Socialist Rule of Law Culture" stipulates that "we should adhere to a people-centered approach, ensuring that the construction of socialist rule of law culture is for the people and relies on the people, and continuously meet the people's growing needs for democracy, the rule of law, fairness and justice", and "guide all the people to become loyal advocates, conscious observers and staunch defenders of the socialist rule of law". The "Guiding Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Rural Governance" supports the participation of multiple entities in rural governance. It requires "strengthening the construction of organizations such as women's federations, youth leagues and disability associations, and fully leveraging their roles in connecting with the masses, uniting the masses and organizing the masses to participate in democratic management and democratic supervision. Actively play the role of service-oriented, public welfare-oriented and mutual-aid-oriented community social organizations." From this, it can be seen that the construction of rule of law culture cannot solely rely on a "top-down" approach. Although this approach can significantly enhance the efficiency of rule of law culture construction, the state cannot undertake everything, especially in professional service areas and vast rural regions. Translate this paragraph into English in a way that is more American in style. Please provide only the final translation without any additional text.

Culture takes shape through interaction among diverse stakeholders. In exploring a multi-stakeholder approach to building a rural culture of the rule of law, direct government involvement can be complemented by public service procurement, volunteer initiatives, and active participation from local professionals, institutions, and industry associations—all contributing to the advancement of a rule-of-law culture in rural revitalization.

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